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UNESCO the Courier

October 1998

Human rights: the struggle continues

Climate change
the debate heats up

Drugs
surveillance or punishment?

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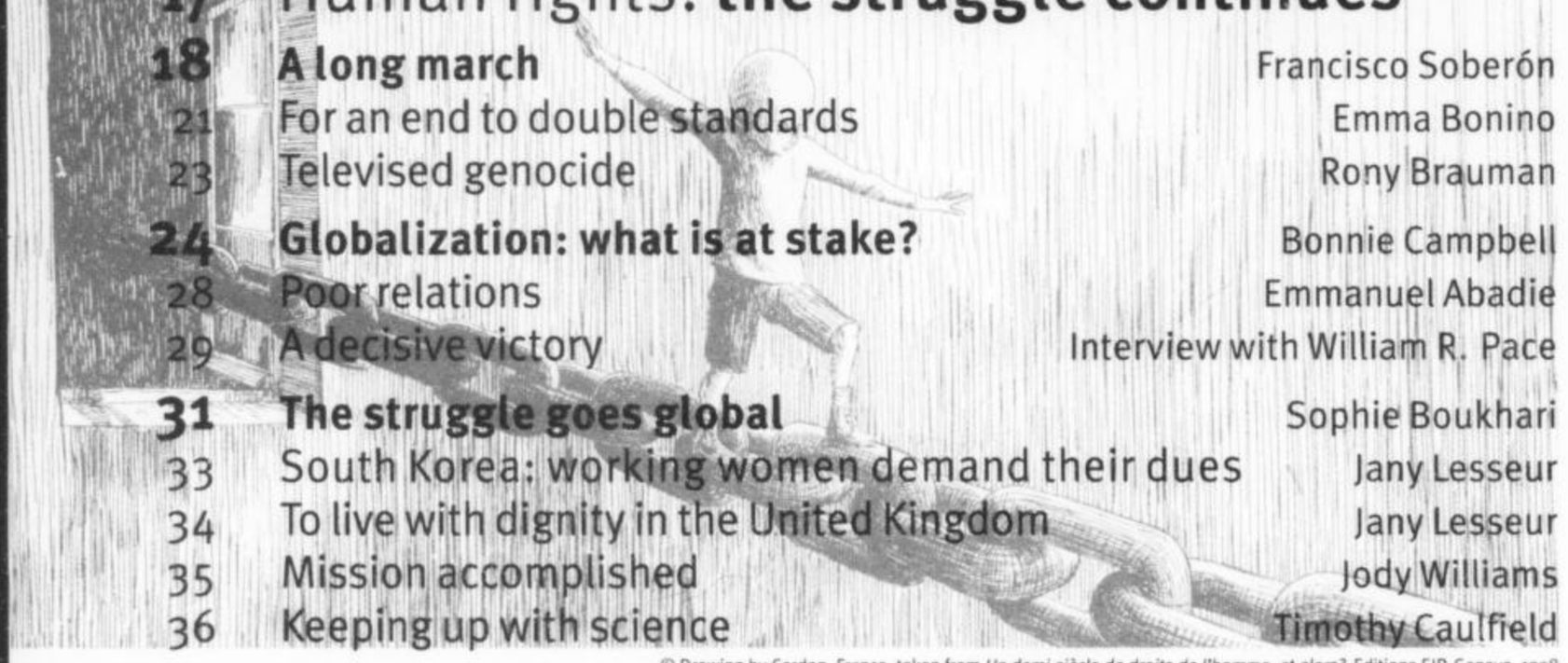

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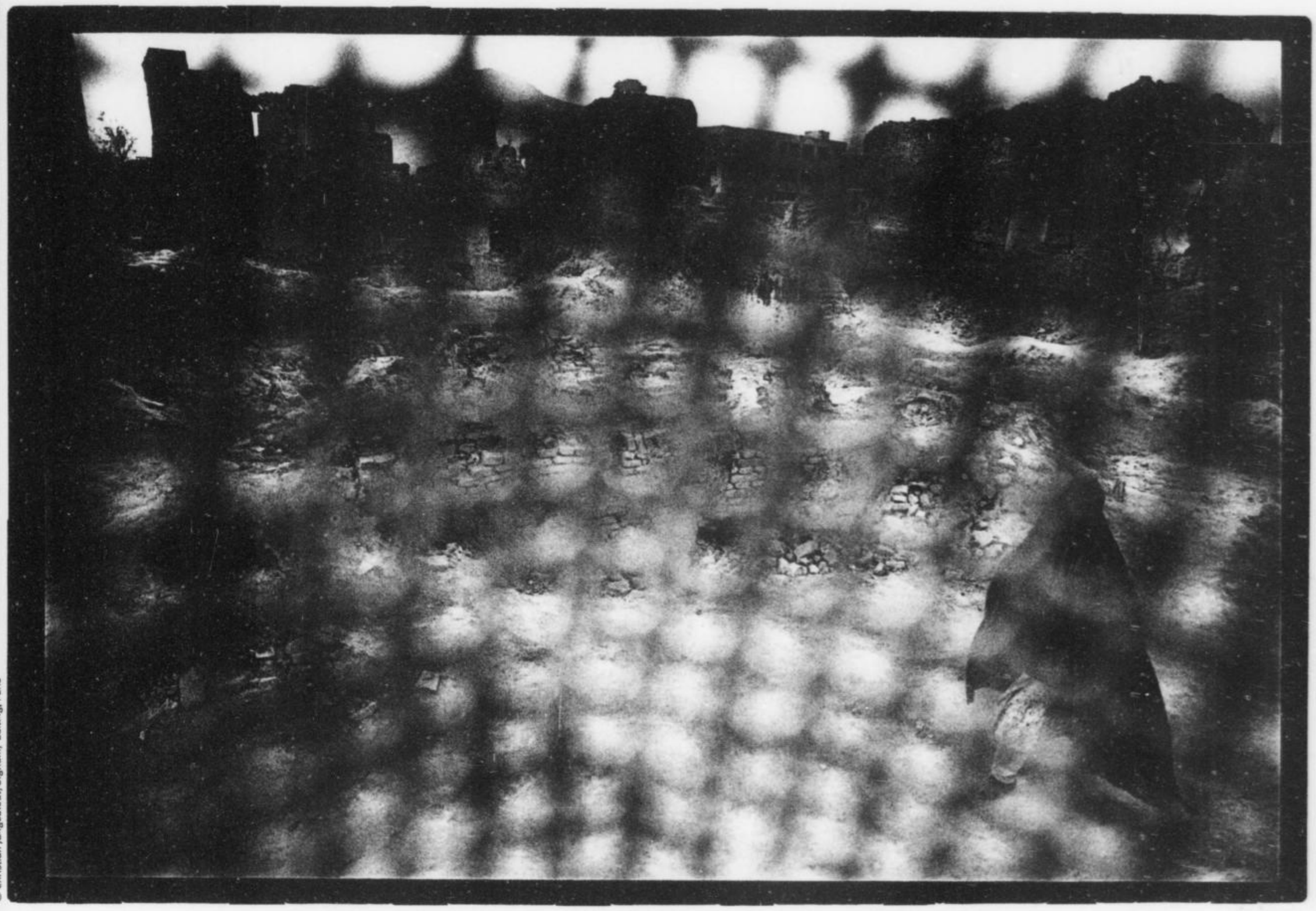

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This is what a woman sees through a *chadri*, the only kind of outer clothing permitted by the Taliban.

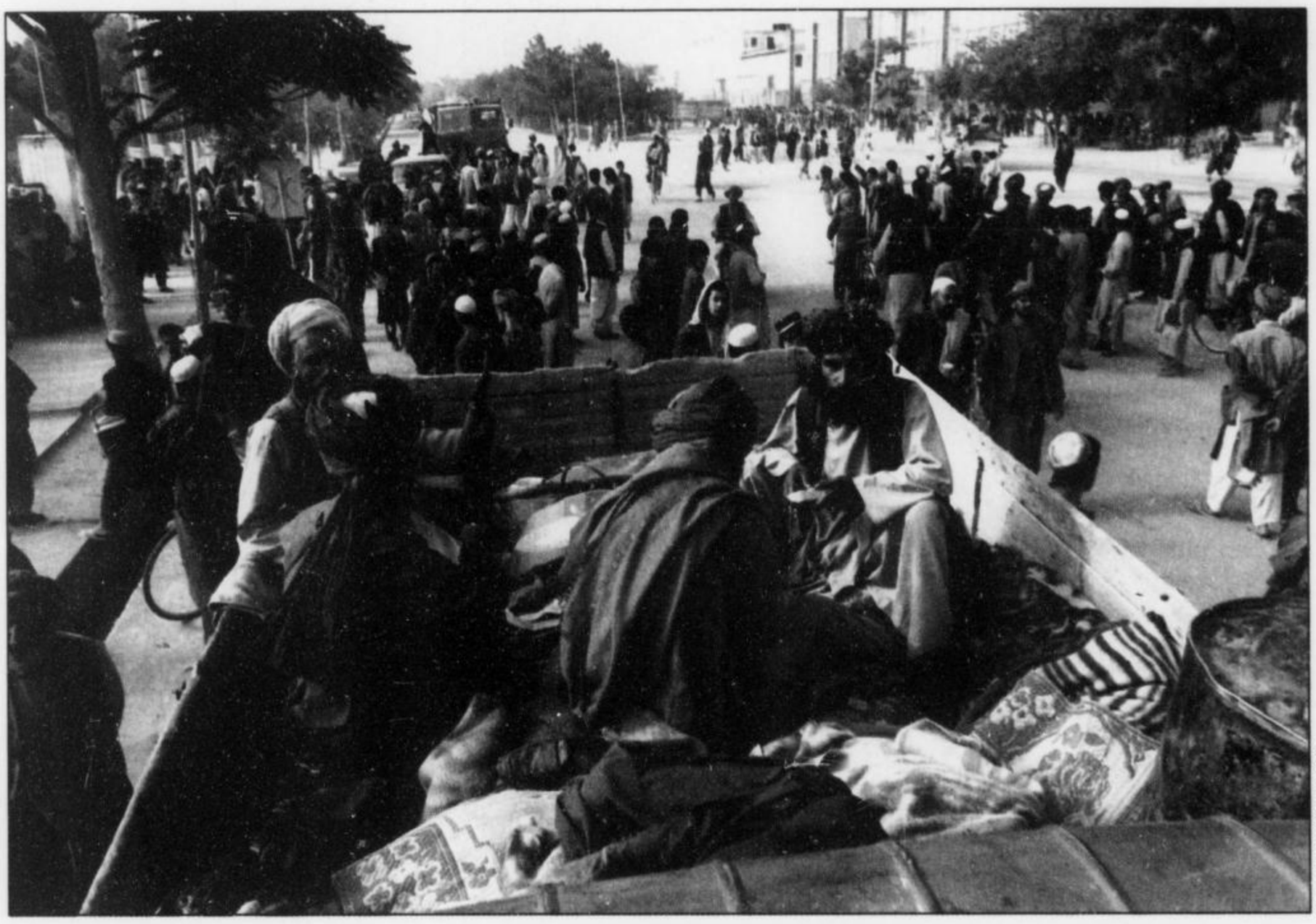
Kabul: **women in the shadows**

Kabul, March 1998. It has been raining for two days in the rubble-strewn capital of Afghanistan, a country at war since 1979. The streets of the central bazaar have turned to mud. Wrapped in thin blankets they use as coats, Kabul's residents shuffle through the city. There are men but few women, who today live under harsh laws that seem to date back to the Middle Ages. In a few months a series of prohibitive measures has targeted the frightened, bereft female population. Forbidden to walk in the streets alone, like shadows they hug the walls of sun-dried brick in groups of two or three.

Since September 1996, the new masters of Kabul have imposed apartheid on 80 per cent of Afghanistan. This time, segregation is not based on skin colour but on gender

Wrapped in the *chadri*, a veil that covers every inch of their bodies, they peer out from behind fabric screens. Women are forbidden to work or study. Worse yet, they are not allowed to seek out care in public hospitals. Since 1997 they have only been allowed to visit private clinics—which few can afford—or a run-down hospital without water, electricity, heat or an operating room. In other words, it is just a place to die.

In the Afghanistan of the Taliban, or "religion students", only male doctors can work in hospitals—but they are not allowed to treat or operate on women. Dr. Shams, ▶



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Mazar i Sharif, 1997: Women are excluded from the male-dominated world of the Taliban.

© James Nachtwey/Magnum, Paris

Women are left to mourn the dead, visiting cemeteries like this one in Kabul (1996) when they are allowed to leave home.

Opposite page:
At a refugee camp in the northern town of Kamaz, a woman shows her mutilated thumb. Her nail was torn out because she wore nail polish.

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who watched his cousin die without being allowed to care for her, seethes with anger. "The Taliban are nothing but extremists, soldiers who impose their will on the people by force," he said. "They are savages who do not consider women human beings and have relegated them to the rank of animals." Dr. Shams is married but has no children. "If by some misfortune I had a daughter, what kind of future would she have?"

Shaima, 20, feels as if her future has been taken away. "Before the Taliban came," she said, "I was a medical student, I wore jeans, I listened to music, I went to the movies and I went out with my friends. All that was prohibited overnight. Whenever I go out I have to wear the *chadri*, which gives me a headache. And my brother or my father must come with me. It's unbearable."

'Before the Taliban, I was a medical student, I wore jeans, listened to music, went to the movies and went out with my friends'

Seated beside Shaima is her mother, Mar Gul. A school principle until 1996, she says, "Our life has become a prison and my daughter's future will amount to washing clothes, cooking and doing housework. Women do not exist. To the Taliban, all they are good for is having babies."

A small radio hidden under laundry in a corner of the room escaped notice during the Taliban militia's last searches. Mar Gul's eyes followed mine and she smiled. "They took away the television set and cassettes but didn't see the radio. We listen to the BBC on the sly. That's how we know the world is talking a little about us."

Mar Gul and her daughter still manage to scrape by financially, but many Afghan women are less fortunate. In Kabul, thirteen per cent are heads of families. They are not allowed to work but must still feed their children. Wandering the streets to beg for a meagre pittance, some brave the wrath of the Taliban militia for "the promotion of virtue and the prohibition of vice", who beat them with sticks. Others stand on line for food or first aid at centres set up by humanitarian groups. But in July 1998 the Taliban expelled the thirty non-governmental organizations that had been working in the capital's rubble for years. The United Nations, which stayed in Kabul, signed a compromise with the Taliban last May. By the terms of the agreement, the condition of women in the country must change in accordance with Afghan and Islamic traditions.

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Fersitta was a university student and Huma was in high school. Today, neither can continue to study.

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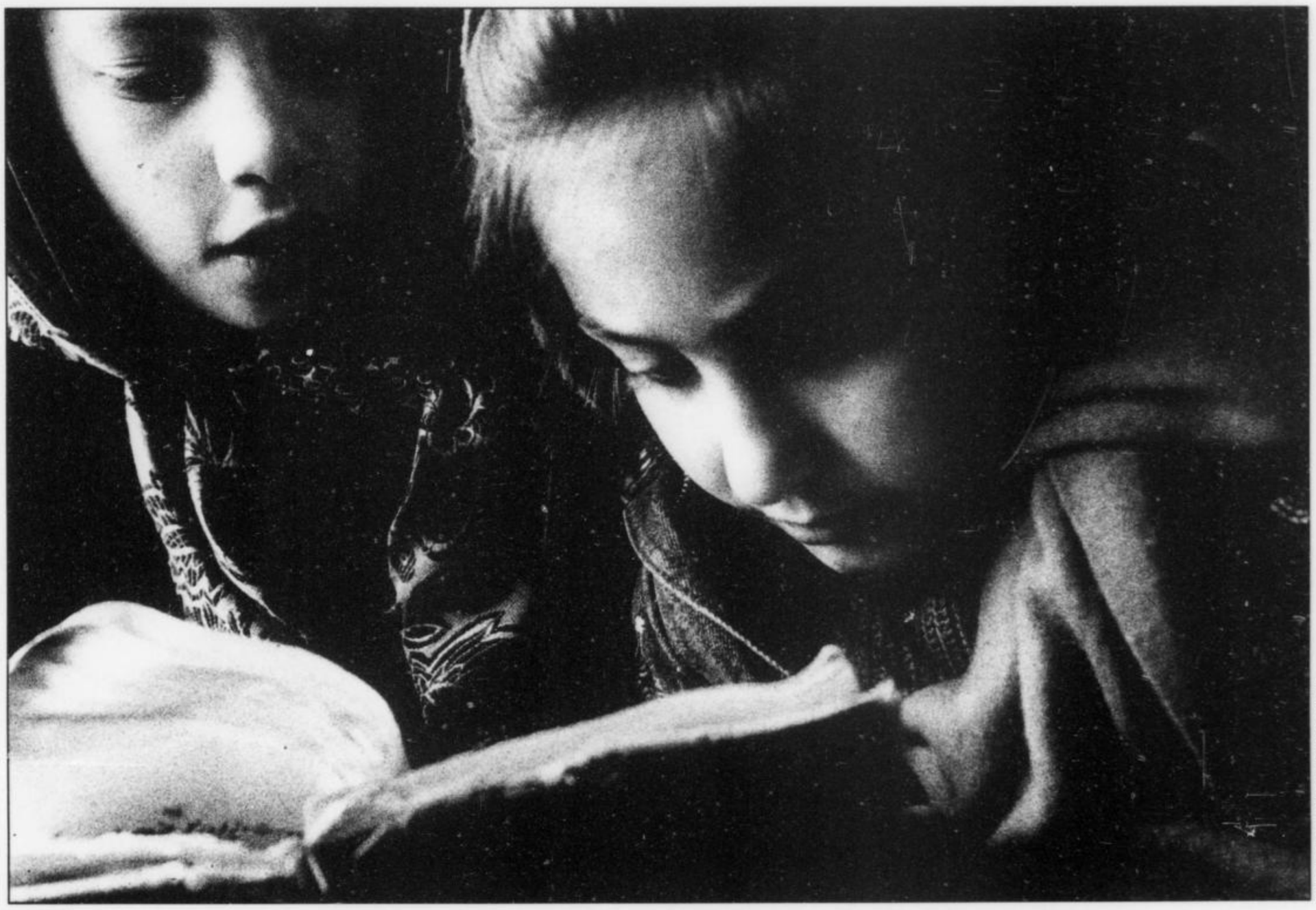
Forbidden to work, many women who have lost their husbands in Afghanistan's long civil war must beg to feed their families.

Without the non-governmental organizations, which gave them a little dignity and enabled a few female doctors and nurses to keep working, what kind of future will these women have? The men in power deny their existence. Now that the Westerners are gone, the Taliban might toughen the laws that allow them to hang and stone people, cut off their hands in public, forbid birds from singing and children from flying kites and prohibit women from living, studying and perhaps even thinking.

Some women refuse to bow down despite the reign of terror. Shamira wears a long dress under her *chadri*. Her ringed fingers and toes are manicured. Her face is oval, her eyes piercing but slightly frightened. Before the Taliban came she was a law professor at the university of Kabul. Today she teaches English in one of the city's many underground schools attended by 800 girls and young women eager to soak up all the knowledge they are not allowed to learn. Shamira rose and walked to the door twice during our interview. When I asked what she was afraid of, she replied that neighbours could have seen us enter the apartment and notified the Taliban. Informing on others is common practice in Afghanistan. Noticing Shamira's dread, I asked her, "What would happen if the Taliban came now?" A look of fear came across her face and she shot back, "We would be hung and you would be thrown in prison." ▶



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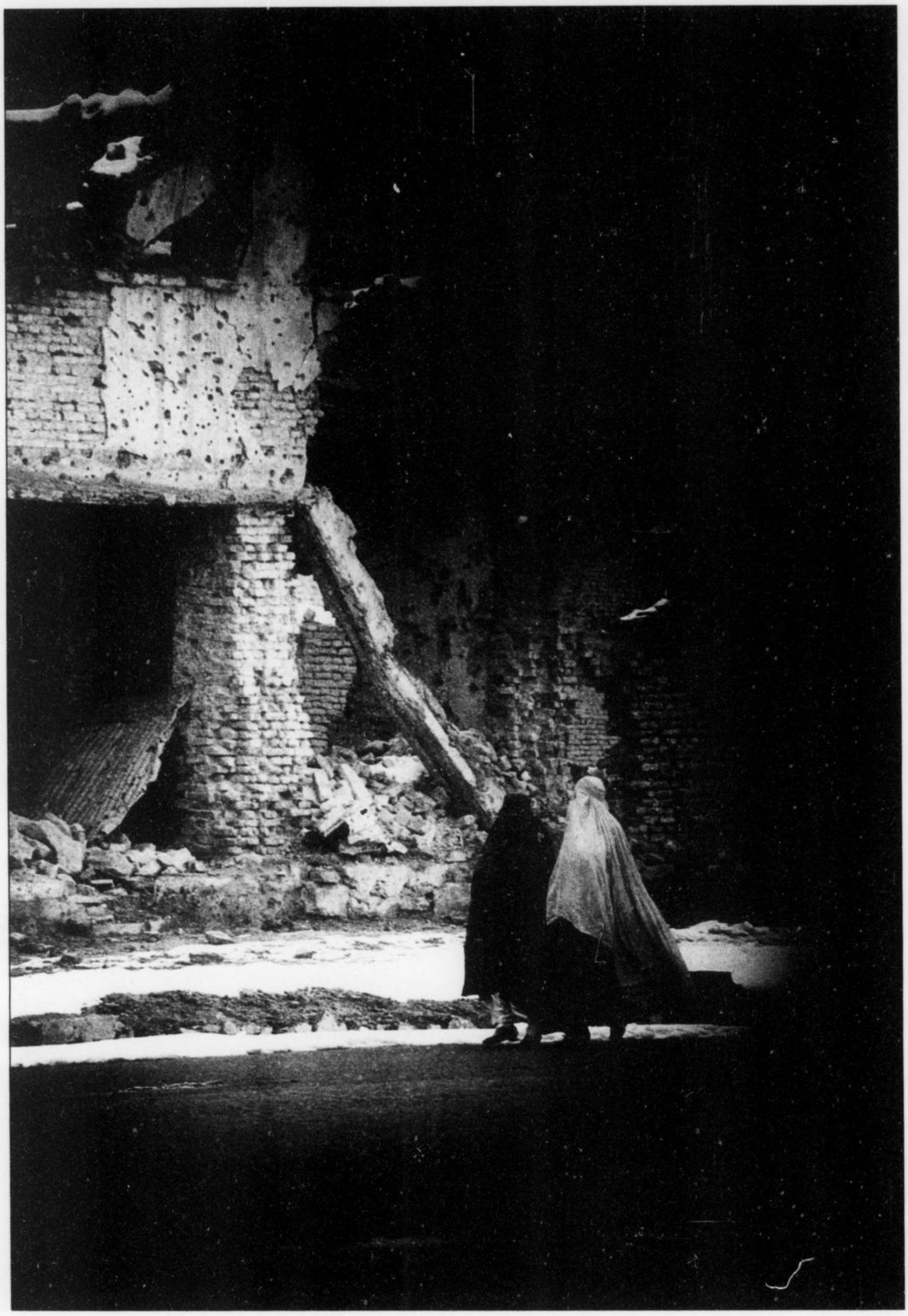
Two young girls learn to read in a clandestine school in Kabul. To avoid punishment they must hide the fact that they are studying.



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Walking through the ruins of Kabul. When will the nightmare end?

Why take such risks? "Because we want to learn. You women are free. You can read, study, think. Well, Afghan women want the same. The Taliban prohibit women from studying because they're afraid they'll revolt. We're already educated. They're not. That's what makes them so scared." In the next room Shamira's students whisper as they repeat their English literature lesson. This was going to be one of their last classes. A few weeks later the Taliban broke into all the underground schools, destroying everything in their wake.

What has become of the girls and young women who had pinned their hopes on learning English, a forbidden language, to prepare for life in a new country? What has become of Farida? She hardly dared to lift her *chadri* during class but whispered that one day she hopes to live in a place where there are no Taliban. There is scant chance her dream will come true. The opposition is weak and the Taliban, who are scoring one victory after the other, now control eighty per cent of Afghanistan. ■

Elizabeth Drévillon

A **universal** responsibility

UNESCO/Ines Forbes

Federico Mayor

On the threshold of a new millennium, the issue of responsibility is taking on a new dimension. Humankind is still beset by war and violence. It also faces new global challenges. The impact of human activity on our planet is so great that for the first time in recorded history, we may be approaching the point of no return. The widening asymmetry within and between countries, environmental destruction and flourishing arms sales raise doubts about many of civilization's values and standards. How can we handle new global threats? History shows that no situation is hopeless if risks are identified early enough.

The conflicts that have arisen since the end of the Cold War have erupted not as a consequence of new freedoms but in reaction to earlier oppression or repression. Suspicion, intolerance and hatred built up over decades, even centuries. But alongside the armed strife of recent years, humankind has begun to demonstrate a new skill in resolving conflicts. Mozambique, El Salvador, the Philippines, the changes in South Africa that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago, the efforts for peace in the Middle East and, finally, the beginnings of a settlement in Northern Ireland are all examples proving that conflict is not inevitable. They demonstrate that breakthroughs to peace can be made by dialogue, mediation, negotiation and imagination—not force.

That is why the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace is the foremost challenge as the twentieth century draws to a close. To succeed we—all of us, day in and day out—must not only do away with approaches based on force and imposition, but profoundly change cultural attitudes and daily behaviour.

Each of us is responsible for replacing the logic of force with the logic of reason and respect for the views of others

We must use imagination and resolution to go to the roots of world problems and nip conflicts in the bud or, better still, prevent them. Learning to live together means daring to share, daring to do things differently, daring to dream of a better, safer, more just and humane world. It also means having the resolve and courage to transform our dreams into reality.

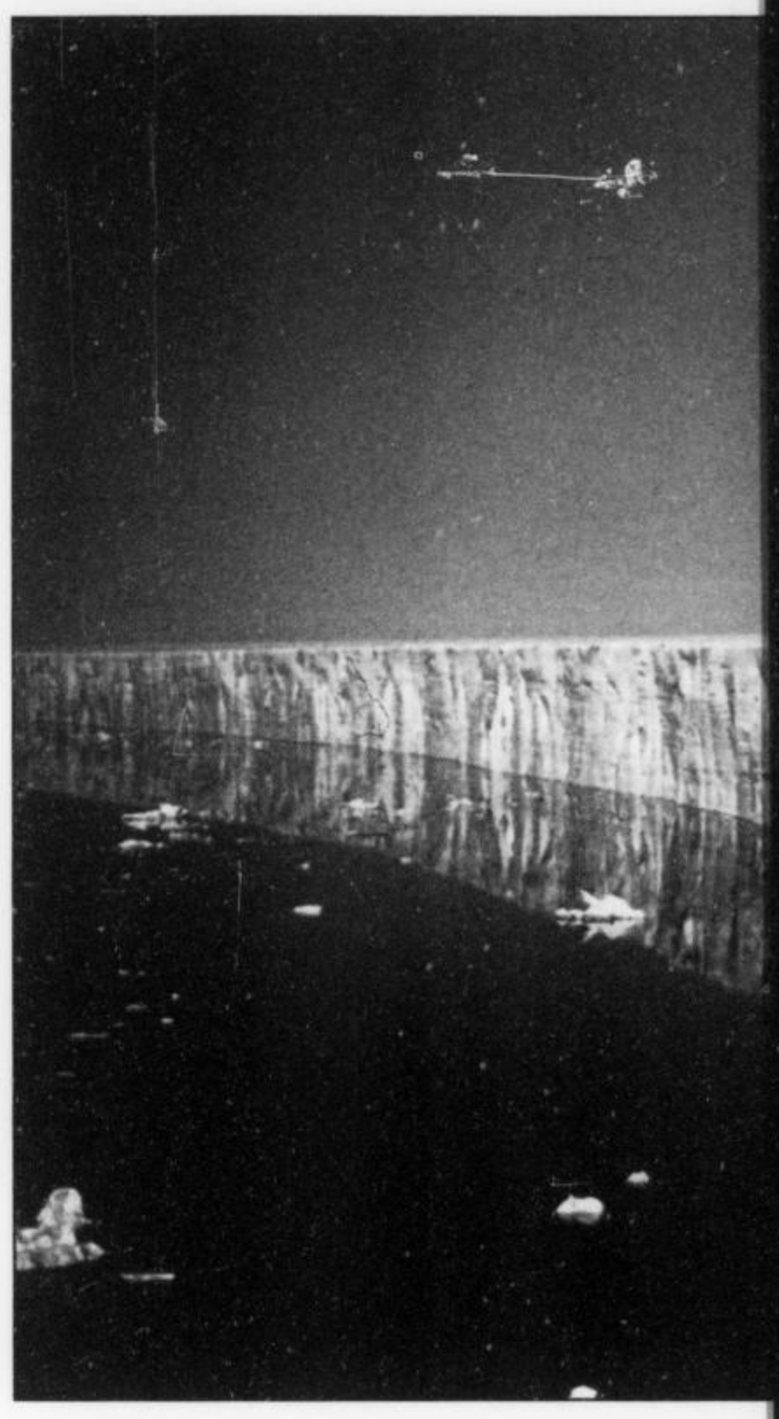
Here I wish to underline the pivotal role of education in promoting a culture of peace. By education, I mean not only formal instruction in schools but also informal training within a whole range of cultural institutions, including in the very first place the family and the media.

Who will be responsible for changing the culture of war into a culture of peace? Governments, parliaments, intergovernmental organizations, we might reply. The answer is correct, but it is not the only one. The transformation cannot be achieved without the active involvement of those with financial resources and influence. This answer would also be true, though only partly so. For in the final analysis, replacing the logic of force and confrontation with the logic of reason and respect for the views of others is a responsibility that belongs to all nations and all citizens, to each of us no matter how great or small the scope of our individual responsibility. The challenge of promoting a culture of peace is so broad and far-reaching that it can only be accomplished if it becomes a priority for the entire United Nations system. The dream of achieving a world without strife and violence is what led the founders of UNESCO to make saving future generations from the scourge of war the organization's prime goal.

The Mahatma Gandhi said, "In the midst of darkness, light prevails." It is that light which is spread by the democratic values enshrined in UNESCO's constitution: justice, freedom, equality and solidarity. ■

Climate change:

Judging by the number of unresolved disagreements, the next round of negotiations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions looks like it will be poisonous. Despite the initial consensus formalized by the Kyoto Protocol signed in Japan last December, major divisions remain. The United States wants to postpone any reductions in domestic energy consumption. Europe, although dragging its feet, has shown greater willingness to respect commitments made under the Protocol. And the developing countries refuse to sacrifice economic growth to reduce a global threat for which they do not feel responsible.



The greenhouse gas **trade**

The Kyoto Protocol to cut carbon emissions in industrialized countries is increasingly understood not as an environmental agreement but perhaps as one of the most significant trade agreements of the century. Given the enormous stakes involved, it is in the interest of developing countries, like India and China, to fully explore the implications of the Protocol instead of succumbing to Western pressure to accept it.

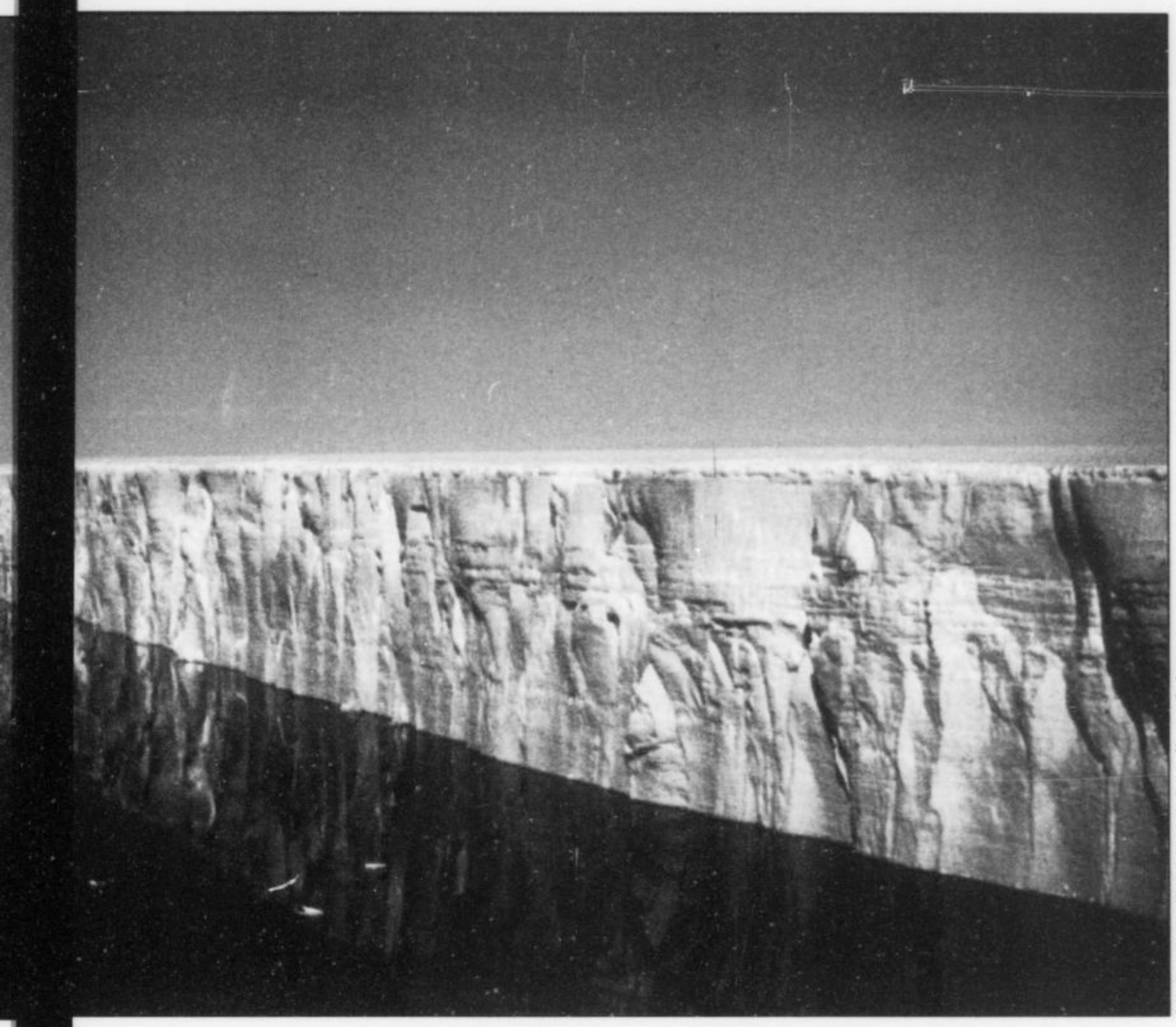
It is important to recognize that the Protocol, signed in December 1997, still marks a step forward in the world's resolve to arrest the problem of human-induced climate change. This is of particular concern for developing countries, which are twice as vulnerable to the resulting damage as industrialized nations, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), set up by the United Nations in 1988. Several commentators, especially in the West, have pointed out the Protocol's possible ineffectiveness. But it also neglects the long-term interests of the current and future generations of developing countries.

Under the Protocol, industrialized countries are expected to cut their overall emissions by at least five percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. The problem is that compliance has been reduced to a numbers game in which countries promising a higher "percentage reduction" are seen as good players and those arguing for lower percentages are the difficult ones. This is a smokescreen drawing attention away from the real issue at stake: the heaviest emitters of greenhouse gases, namely industrialized countries, can continue polluting through an accounting system which allows them to meet their promised emissions reductions targets without actually reducing emissions.

The key to this accounting lies in the base-year calculations which help to determine the "assigned amount" of greenhouse gases each country can emit. If a country does not fully use its assigned amount, it can then sell the remaining portion to another country. High calculations could give countries a head start in meeting their "percentage requirements" later because they simply phase out industries which were grinding to a halt regardless of the Protocol.

This system offers a perverse incentive for developing countries to actually increase their emissions as fast as possible so that if and when they do set their base-year calculations, they too will have a head start in meeting their percentage reductions. This is perhaps the worst aspect of the Protocol: developing countries which move towards energy efficiency in a big way today will find it harder and more expensive to meet high

the debate heats up



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An iceberg detaches from Antarctica. Will global warming melt the polar ice caps?

Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain*

percentage reductions later when base year emissions are set. On the other hand, those countries which continue using high-emission technologies and fuels will find it relatively easy to accept high percentage reductions and as a result will look good in front of the world.

"Meaningful participation"

Yet despite this fatal weakness, the North is putting tremendous pressure on developing countries to take part in the Protocol. United States Vice President Al Gore could not have been more direct when speaking to a press conference in Kyoto on 8 December 1997: "In order to sign an agreement, or in order to send an agreement to the Senate, we must have meaningful participation by key developing countries."

"Meaningful participation" has proven to be a vague and perhaps misleading concept in the Protocol. For example, Article 12 ostensibly promotes North-South cooperation by setting up a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to encourage industrialized countries to invest in carbon-efficient technology in the South. However, the purpose of the CDM is not to help the South but to explicitly "assist" industrialized countries to meet their commitments to reduce emissions. Under the plan, developing countries sell "certified reduction" units to industrialized countries and private corporations in exchange for investment in carbon-efficient programmes. The units can be used as credits in the "balance sheets" of the Protocol's carbon accounting system.

The CDM is riddled with moral and economic loopholes. One can begin by asking if there is no other role for developing countries in combating climate change than just helping industrialized countries meet their commitments. It is important to realize that under the scheme, industrialized countries need not change anything domestically by investing in projects in the South.

At the same time, the CDM offers the North a way of buying the participation of the South. But at what price? It is clearly in the interest of the North to keep the prices of "emission reduction" units as low as possible. The US administration, for example, plans on buying as many emission units as possible at the cheapest cost. So it is not altogether surprising to find American authorities offering as little as $14 to $23 per tonne for emissions credits. In contrast, a domestic emission reduction programme is estimated to run $125 per tonne.

The CDM is designed to ensure that the North has the cheapest array of projects to choose from in the South. Under the CDM, numerous certification agencies will assess internal compliance and reporting mechanisms of countries selling emission reduction units. This will force developing countries to compete with each other in providing the North with the cheapest, most efficient portfolios of projects to invest in.

One thing is clear. Climate change has been taken out of the world of the environmental lobby and placed in the world of money. The goal is now to trade this commodity (emissions) without limits and without the interference of prickly issues like the property rights of the poor.

The cheap deal may be the most expensive

Now let us assume that this brokering system works in the short term and developing countries do move towards more energy-efficient technologies. A longer-term perspective raises important questions. The more efficient these countries become the less economic incentive there is for the industrialized countries to invest in them. It will eventually be cheaper for the North to invest in its own countries. And if global warming is still a threat—as it would be because industrialized countries had not ▶

* Director and deputy director of the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, India

Down with POP!

An anti-POP movement is gaining strength around the world. Nothing much to do with music, though. It's a trend involving a hundred or so countries which are negotiating over the reduction or elimination of persistent organic pollutants (POP), substances which are considered to be some of the most dangerous ever produced by humankind.

They include insecticides like DDT and industrial by-products such as dioxin, huge quantities of which are produced by waste incinerators, and furane, which is used as a solvent in plastics or resinous material. Exposure to POPs can cause cancer, damage the nervous system and interfere with the immune system.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which is co-ordinating the inter-governmental talks, points out that there is now broad agreement on the need to cut down on the use of such toxic materials. But this surface consensus cannot hide the disagreement between rich and poor countries on the subject. The industrialized nations have already banned or restricted the use of various POPs, such as DDT and several chlorine compounds.

Thirty-two countries in Europe and North America even signed, at the end of June, two memorandums on air pollution aimed at strengthening these measures. The intention was to step up the international anti-pollution movement to avoid the consequences of the "grasshopper effect," whereby pollutants travel from one side of the globe to the other through the air or in the sea. Only world-wide measures can curb the effects of this on local populations.

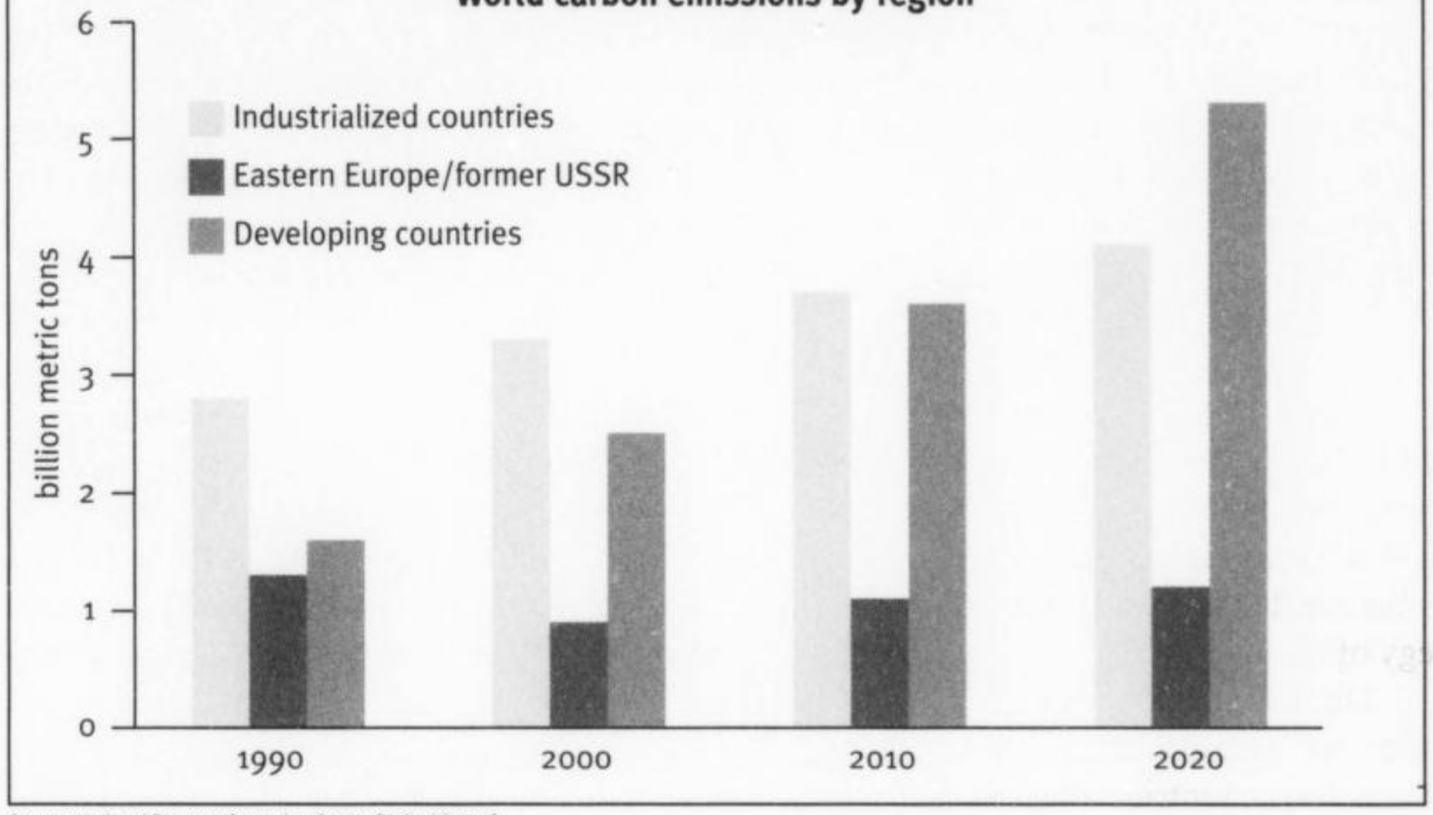
Against this approach stand the poorer countries, which continue, for example, to use DDT to fight malaria, which kills more than two million people every year. They want the rich countries to dip into their pockets to help them use less harmful but often more costly alternatives.

In short, the anti-POP campaign does not have its song ready yet. The negotiating countries met in Montreal, Canada, in July and gave themselves until the end of the century to finish writing the score. ■

taken any action at home—then there would be pressure on developing countries to cut back yet again on carbon dioxide emissions, this time on their own and at a higher price. So what form of institutional co-operation will be available then?

The CDM does not answer this question. It leaves the future of North-South co-operation on climate change up in the air. Even worse, it allows current generations in developing countries to sell off cheaper emissions-control options today, leaving an

World carbon emissions by region



Source: National Energy Information Center (United States)

Pollution

The Kyoto Protocol was endorsed at the eleventh hour on 10 December 1998 by representatives of some 150 governments after adding a final point. Since they failed to reach a consensus on several key issues, they would negotiate them later, in particular at the fourth conference of the signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Buenos Aires from 2 to 13 November, 1998. But as the conference nears, those countries are still far from agreement, judging by the heated discussions during a preparatory meeting in Bonn last June.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the industrialized countries (called the Appendix One states) will have to cut their overall greenhouse gas emissions by five per cent, generally below 1990 levels, between now and the period 2008-2012. However, this objective masks a wide range of different commitments. The United States has agreed to cut its emissions by eight per cent, the European Union (with different targets for different member states), Switzerland and most central and eastern European countries by eight per cent and Japan and Canada by six per cent. Russia, Ukraine and New Zealand will be allowed to maintain their current emissions levels. Some countries will be permitted to increase them, including Norway by one per cent, Australia by eight per cent and Iceland by as much as ten per cent.

But the United States, which accounts for approximately one-fifth of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, has repeatedly said it will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol unless certain conditions are met. Washington insists on the "meaningful participation" of developing countries (see preceding article) as well as on the swift establishment of an international market to trade "emissions permits".

This system, the details of which have not yet been ironed out, is intended to encourage some countries to cut their emissions below the assigned levels so that they can then "sell" the difference. That would entitle major energy consumers such as the United States and countries which would find it very expensive to cut emissions, like Japan, to "buy" the right to continue polluting at home from other countries.

Their aim is to safeguard industrial competitiveness by avoiding costly outlays to reduce emissions and, in some cases, to preserve an energy-guzzling lifestyle.

Sources close to the White House say the Clinton administration is hoping to

even heavier financial burden for future generations.

The principles of this emissions trade will be further elaborated at November's Conference of Parties in Buenos Aires. This is the occasion, however, to go a step further in recognizing and building upon the principle of "equal per capita entitlements" in which all individuals have the right to emit the same amount of greenhouse gases. This strategy would be used to calculate emissions entitlements based on each country's population. Not only would such a step be globally just, but it would offer the best way to move towards the ultimate objective of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (the origins of the Kyoto Protocol), namely the stabilization of the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. This equitable approach is far more effective than the creative accounting strategy of the Protocol.

Discussions in Buenos Aires must also take into account the rapid rate at which developing countries are growing. If they did accept the Protocol, they would have "assigned amounts" of emissions. However, it is unlikely they could make full use of these entitlements in the near future. Instead, an equitable and environmental solution lies in letting them trade this unused entitlement later as their economies develop. This provision would immediately give them the incentive to trade—not merely to help industrialized countries meet their targets—as well as to move towards a low-emissions development path in which the trading benefits and options stay open as long as possible.

This economic environment would help create a global market for Western solar energy technologies—first in developing countries and then in industrialized nations—to help kick-start the global transition towards zero-emissions technologies. The faster these technologies invade the energy sector, the quicker the world would be able to avert the threat of climate change. In this way, developing countries would, to use the US phrase, enter the most meaningful form of participation. ■

on the cheap

meet at least three-quarters of its Kyoto commitment by buying permits from other countries, especially Russia, which under the Protocol is only required to stabilize its emissions ten years from now at the 1990 level. In fact, emissions there have already fallen due in large part to the country's economic recession. So Russia has a surplus of pollution credits that does not result from a real effort to cut emissions.

When this "hot air," as the negotiators call it, goes on the market, it is likely to push down the price of permits. That will ease the pressure on the rich countries to invest in more energy-efficient technologies. The Europeans are quick to point this out in raising doubts on the system's long-term effectiveness. They cite Article 17 of the Kyoto Protocol, which basically says that trade in permits should only supplement countries' efforts to reduce their emissions but must not replace them.

What will happen, they ask, when the "hot air" runs out and the price of permits rises on the international market, if by then individual countries have not taken steps to reorganize hard sectors such as transport? Europe wants to see the "supplementarity" issue at the centre of the Buenos Aires negotiations.

Several observers say the European countries also fear a threat to industrial competitiveness and to the durability of their economic model. Europe is worried that market forces will eat away at their arsenal of energy taxes, just when some countries are looking to raise them to make up for lower labour taxes, which were cut to boost employment.

Trade in permits should supplement efforts to reduce emissions, not replace them

J.W. Anderson, an American expert on the Protocol, says, "The Kyoto process involves nearly every government in the world and the means by which their people power their industries, transport their goods and themselves, heat their homes and cook their suppers."

Given the stakes and their complexity, the negotiations are likely to crawl ahead at a snail's pace. But the most important thing is that they continue. ■

Sophie Boukhari

A new name for **El Niño**

It originates in the tropical waters of the Pacific. In its wake it leaves a trail of flattened crops and homes, torrential downpours, drought, flooding, bursts of cold weather and hurricane-force winds.... In recent times, there has scarcely been a natural disaster for which it has not been blamed. In Latin America alone, it has been the cause of at least 900 deaths and of economic losses amounting to more than $20 billion.

It is known as El Niño—"the little one". This was the name given by Peruvian fishermen because its effects were felt over the Christmas period when, according to the Christian religion, the infant Jesus was born.

Worried by such headlines in the press as "El Niño: Beware!" or "We are being threatened by El Niño", the Colombian Red Cross has launched a campaign calling for this disastrous phenomenon to be given another name.

And there was even greater anxiety with the arrival of La Niña, a current related to El Niño with equally devastating effects.

At the initiative of Colombia, the national Red Cross societies of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela have signed joint petitions stating, "it has been observed that the children of Latin American countries are being upset by the fact that the word by which they are known has come to be associated with destruction and death." For this reason they hoped that "the public and the specialized agencies will realize the harmful consequences of this misuse of language."

Roberto Liévano Perdomo, vice-president of the Colombian Red Cross, is the leader of the movement aimed at having the term "El Niño" replaced by "Pacific phenomenon", after the ocean in which it occurs.

However, some people claim—and they are not entirely wrong—that the term "Pacific phenomenon" could also give rise to misunderstanding, since it is a destructive phenomenon that is not exactly "pacific".

Even so, outside Latin America and Colombia in particular, where the new term is already starting to be used, it is so far only a declaration of intent, since the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has not officially recorded any petition to that effect. ■

www.$$$@online.

The construction boom in "virtual classrooms" is leading universitites to find new partners and competitors in the corporate world

The sleek towers and domed halls of Singapore's Temasek Polytechnic offer the services students dream of—state-of-the-art libraries and data bases, easy course registration, tutorials, study guides, financial advice for tuition and more—all without hours or energy wasted waiting in line. If seeing is believing, why not wander over to the students' centre for a quick visit? A few keystrokes on the Internet and you are there.

Welcome to the world of online education. Students around the globe can enrol in classes like Temasek's, which cover everything from engineering to tourism and even an introduction to Japanese Katakana characters. Time and distance are no longer an obstacle to learning, as students download specially designed courses according to their own schedules, with tutorials and extra materials available via e-mail, CD-roms and electronic libraries open around the clock. Exams, papers and even private consultations with professors or other students are all done within the comfort of home.

In the last year, virtual classrooms of all shapes and sizes have been under construction around the world, offering very real solutions for universities and training institutes threatened by dwindling public resources and students needing more flexible course materials and schedules to compete in today's job market. Mexico's Monterey Institute of Technology, for example, is developing online courses and importing them from universities north of the border. Even the World Bank is getting involved with plans for a virtual university in Africa. And while it is natural to find traditional distance education providers such as UK Open University breaking into this new field, prestigious brand-name schools are also investing. Duke University of the United States has proudly opened its "Global Executive MBA" to a hand-picked class of mostly international businesspeople with tuiton at $85,000.

This new distance education is a far cry from the lowly correspondence courses of the past, seen as a "second-chance" for those who couldn't make it in or have access to regular educational channels. It also represents not just another learning opportunity but a promising new market for telecommunications and computer corporations, vying to provide the "piping"—satellite systems, computer platforms for administration or "smart cards" offering access to electronic libraries—to deliver services far and wide. From Germany to Malaysia, telecommunications and computer giants are negotiating "wiring" costs with public and private learning institutions, now seen as new partners for computer companies like Microsoft and Apple.

Consider the case of Western Governors University (WGU) formed in 1997 by a group of governors from the western United States. Convinced that education

'Globalization is a term that gets used a lot, but just like trade and commerce, education is becoming more and more integrated across national borders'

was failing to meet the needs of employers and students alike, they created a virtual university which distributes services (courses) developed by associated universities and corporate training programmes. The real surprise lies in its National Advisory Board, a powerful mix of state representatives and business leaders from companies like Microsoft, Apple, Sun Microsystems, IBM and above all AT&T, (one of the world's largest telecommunications companies), which has donated more than $750,000. With backing like this, the governors are broadening their horizons, moving beyond the local market by brokering co-operative agreements with overseas "suppliers"—universities and telecom companies—in Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico and China.

"Globalization is a term that gets used a lot, but just like trade and commerce, education is becoming more and more integrated across national borders," says Reidar Roll of the non-profit International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), which includes learning institutes and corporations in more than 130 countries. "We are beginning to see a more global education market."

Roll doesn't seem to question the rise of this "market"—a battle cry for those who see education as a public responsibility and not a commodity. Yet in this new electronic age of distance education, the fine line between the private and public sectors has been blurred from the start. While universities did much of the research and development making online learning technologically possible—often with corporate support—it is the private sector which supplies the pieces needed to build the virtual campus.

Even the course content is market-based. Online students are for the most part not looking for philosophy or art history classes but professional training in areas like business management, financial services, English, information technologies, teaching and health sciences.

In short, the incredible potential for online learning lies in the insecurity of today's job market as the ever-shortening shelf-life of knowledge forces the "professionally fit" to continually upgrade their skills. In Finland, for example, 45% of employed adults between the ages of 25 to 64 take part in some form of career-related continuing education and training during a year, according to a 1997 survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Even Canada's low rate of 28 per cent still represents considerable demand.

"People want to acquire the skills that are applicable and enhance their mobility," says John Mallea, a Canadian expert in the field and consultant for the OECD. "In Eastern

education

and Central Europe, professionals are studying international trade, European law, financial services, computer training and English in numbers we haven't seen before. Until last year's currency crisis, Asia was a huge growth area, with more than 50 MBA programmes being offered in Hong Kong alone, many by distance means."

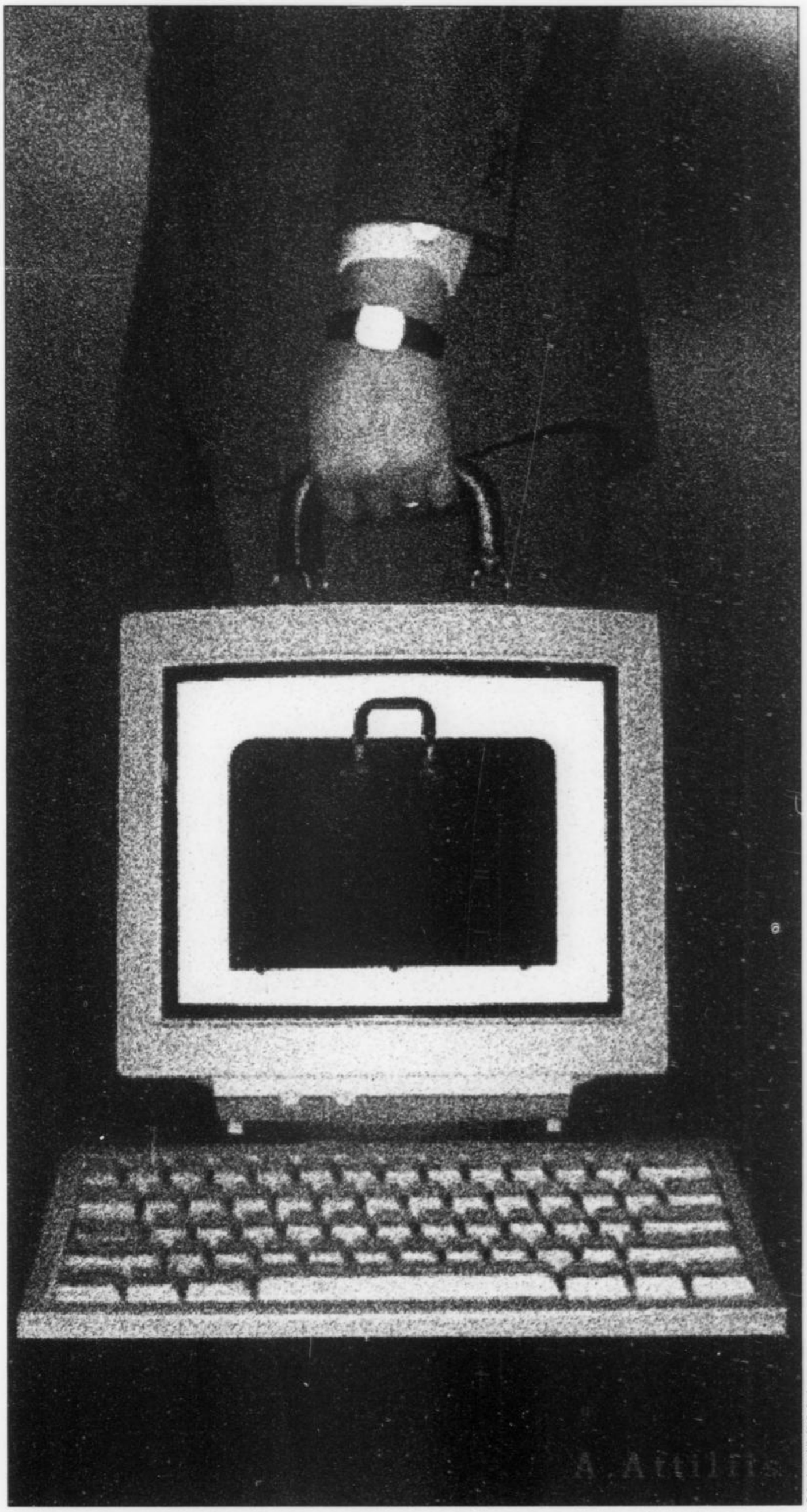
At the same time, regional trade agreements in North America, Europe and Southeast Asia are opening the door to free trade in educational services, particularly in professional training, which is considered less sensitive than primary or secondary schooling in terms of national autonomy. "Education is considered a service like any other," says a legal officer of the World Trade Organization, who points out that 30 countries, from Ghana to Norway and Rwanda, have signed on to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) with specific commitments assuring foreign providers fair access to their educational markets.

A new market in grey matter

For better or worse, free trade in online education is still far from a reality. A battery of barriers or buffers—depending on your point of view—is firmly in place. To begin with, academic accreditation systems are still the preserve of national authorities and so vary greatly from one country to the next. The lack of technological standards is another obstacle in delivering education from one country or region to another.

At the same time, financial questions remain on issues like taxation and intellectual property. For example, should an Australian company pay local revenue taxes for courses sold in Malaysia? Or consider the case of Mexican students attending a Canadian university. They usually pay higher admission fees than local tax-paying students. Should the same rules apply to their online compatriots? Finally, how can teachers protect their intellectual property rights on courses and materials beamed around the world?

A long list of task forces and forums is working in universities and international organizations to tackle these thorny issues. At the same time, the private sector is more than willing to help, by offering grants, technical advice and other forms of support to ensure a free flow of services.



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Online learning is revolutionizing education as computer and telecommunications companies seek to develop this new market.

While it is too soon for any accurate forecasts of the online education market—estimates vary from one to four billion dollars for the year 2000—there are growing fears that companies will eventually take over the role of learning institutes. "If Microsoft wanted to, they could create a university to compete," says Roll of ICDE. "Or if Harvard wanted to, they could enter alliances to offer them (the companies) a brand name on the international market. I think the plans are there."

Not so fast, says Jim Kuhr, manager of Microsoft's worldwide education activities. "We don't see ourselves as an educational company—we are not experts in curriculum or pedagogy. Our focus has been to work with partners who are specialists in that. But we do have an interest in providing the infrastructure pieces—like network operating systems, share files and e-mail—needed to make distance learning successful."

It is difficult to justify tax dollars spent on education if the private sector can do the job as well as the public sector

While Kuhr recognizes brand-name universities as obvious marketing targets, the real heavyweights may lie in developing countries in Asia and Latin America. "The enrolment potential is going up so dramatically that the governments cannot afford to build the brick and mortar campuses to meet the demand. These governments see online learning and other opportunities in the information society as a way to radically move their countries ahead—that is, if they find the initial investment for infrastructure."

In fact, "wiring" is becoming less of a financial burden as telecom prices fall with deregulation. And with the current spate of mergers transforming the industry, new markets like online education are becoming all the more competitive.

AT&T's interest in online education is "multi-layered", according to Marilyn Reznick of the telecom giant's philanthropic foundation. "We have a responsibility to make sure that people can understand the technologies we develop. It is also in our interest to send our philanthropic dollars to universities where we do business, recruit people, train our employees and do our R&D."

"We might also go to a university with which we have relations and ask, 'are you going to provide the workers we need?' If not, we will help provide the resources to develop that training. But we would never dream of telling them how to teach. We are not competing with them."

A sigh of relief from the ivory towers? "I am not sure that any corporation will tell you their strategy," says Tony Bates, director of the Distance Education and Technology unit of Canada's University of British Columbia. "And if they did, that strategy may change. For instance, we are actually making a profit on some of our online courses. Who knows what will happen once that gets out."

The secret to the university's success lies in cherry-picking and niche-marketing. "To offer a basic microbiology course, we would need some competitive advantage over the rest of the world, like a Nobel Prize winner, which we don't have. But with our contacts in the forestry department, we are offering courses in wood science, for example, in Indonesia and Australia, where there is an emerging regional market in secondary wood products.

"All of this sounds like someone trying to run a business, and I am surprised to find myself liking this role," says Bates. "This is in response to a government which tells us to be less dependent on taxes. This is not an inevitable result of market forces but a political decision."

However, there is a fine line between profit-making and becoming profit-driven. "You have to ask, 'what is the role of a publicly funded college?" says Bates. "It is difficult to justify tax dollars spent on education if the private sector can do the job as well as the public sector. But I think the public needs some independent critique and analysis of the government and private sector policies. Somebody has to have the independence to ask who is benefiting in a society."

There is also a question of equity. "There are areas that you just cannot make money on, like education for the handicapped or social work courses. That is where the government has to step in to ensure that all sectors of society are served as much as possible." ■

Amy Otchet

Useful websites:

Temasek: ole.tp.ac.sg
Open University: www.open.ac.uk
Duke University: www.fuqua.duke.edu
WGU: www.westgov.org
ICDE: www.icde.org
Microsoft: www.microsoft.com/edu

Brazil takes Spanish

Young Brazilians can no longer be content with learning only English; they have to learn Spanish as well. This view, advocated by Senator José Forgaça of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), has been supported by the upper chamber of Congress, which approved a draft law that will make it mandatory to teach Spanish in all the country's government secondary schools.

According to the ministry of education, the project will enrol some 6.5 million pupils and require at least 200,000 teachers. That is why the bill, originally drafted by a former president and current senator, Itamar Franco, will be introduced only gradually over a five-year period.

The idea of making it compulsory to learn Spanish, which is still awaiting final congressional approval, has been evolving. Senator Pedro Simón, also a member of the PMDB, proposed in 1995 that learning Spanish should be made obligatory, although only in the states bordering Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina which, like Brazil, are members of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR).

In fact, ever since Brazil joined MERCOSUR, Spanish has clearly gained ground. Classes are in demand in the private schools that have been sprouting like mushrooms in the country's main cities. Meanwhile, *portuñal*, a hybrid of Portuguese and Spanish, has become a working language commonly used in diplomatic circles in Brasilia and business spheres of São Paulo.

The project is not merely a question of education but involves considerable economic interests. According to Senator Fogaça, the new law "will be instrumental in forming a true Latin American community" which will more than ever integrate Brazil, the only Portuguese-speaking giant in an otherwise Spanish-speaking region.

Spanish, the official language of 21 countries and spoken by 413 million people, is the world's fourth most widely spoken tongue after Chinese, English and Hindi. It is also gaining ground as a second language in the United States. ■

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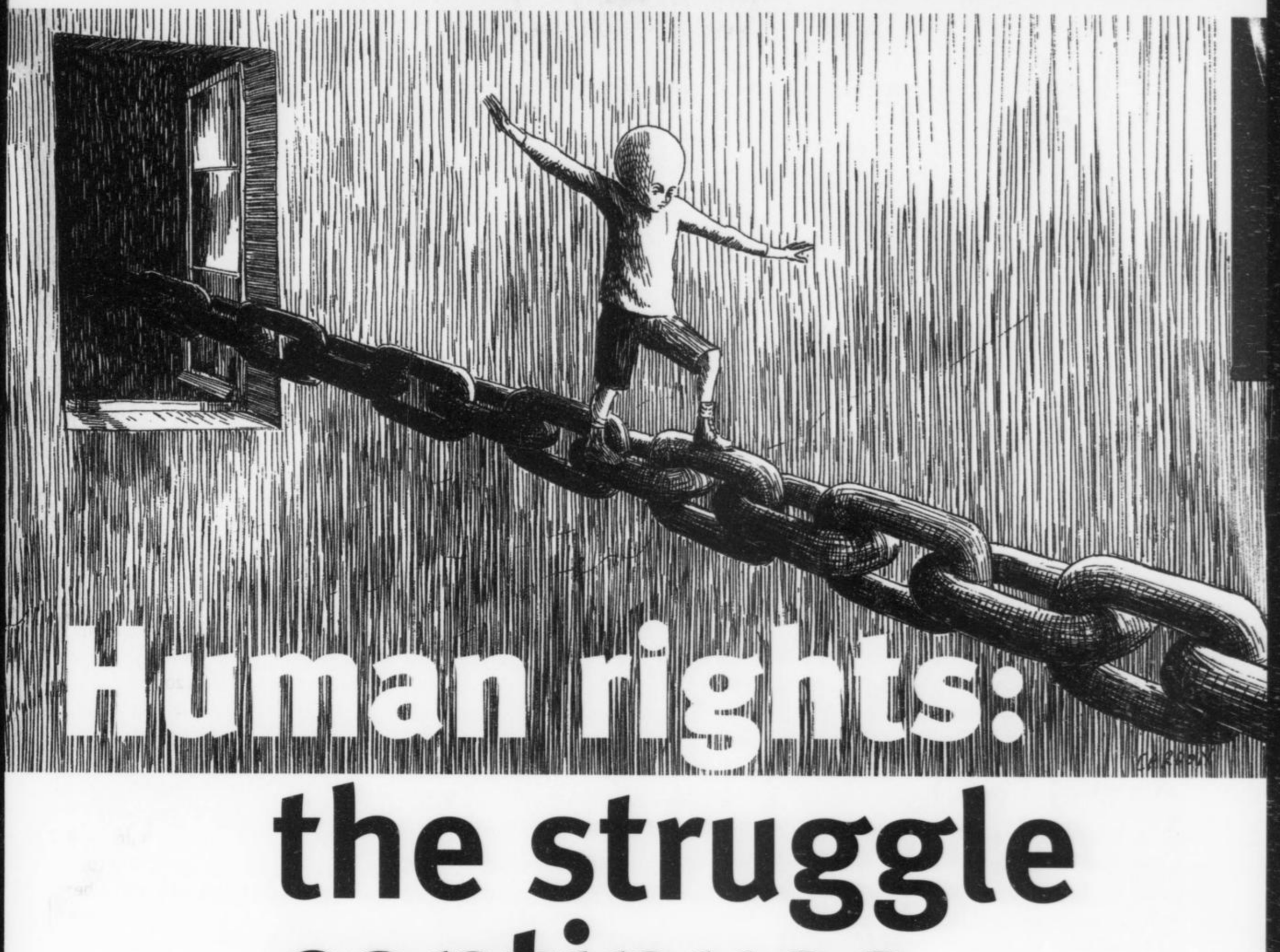

the struggle continues

Respect for human rights has come a long way, some say. Others argue that they are still flouted almost everywhere, and that the return of unbridled market forces around the globe threatens the strides made in the past half-century. Progress here, setbacks there, new demands everywhere. As the world changes, who is fighting to defend human dignity and fulfil the universal aspiration to a better life? And how? What are states, citizens and international bodies doing to promote rights that too many people still do not enjoy? Is globalization making the struggle easier or more difficult? One thing is sure: the long battle for "all rights for everyone" is far from over.

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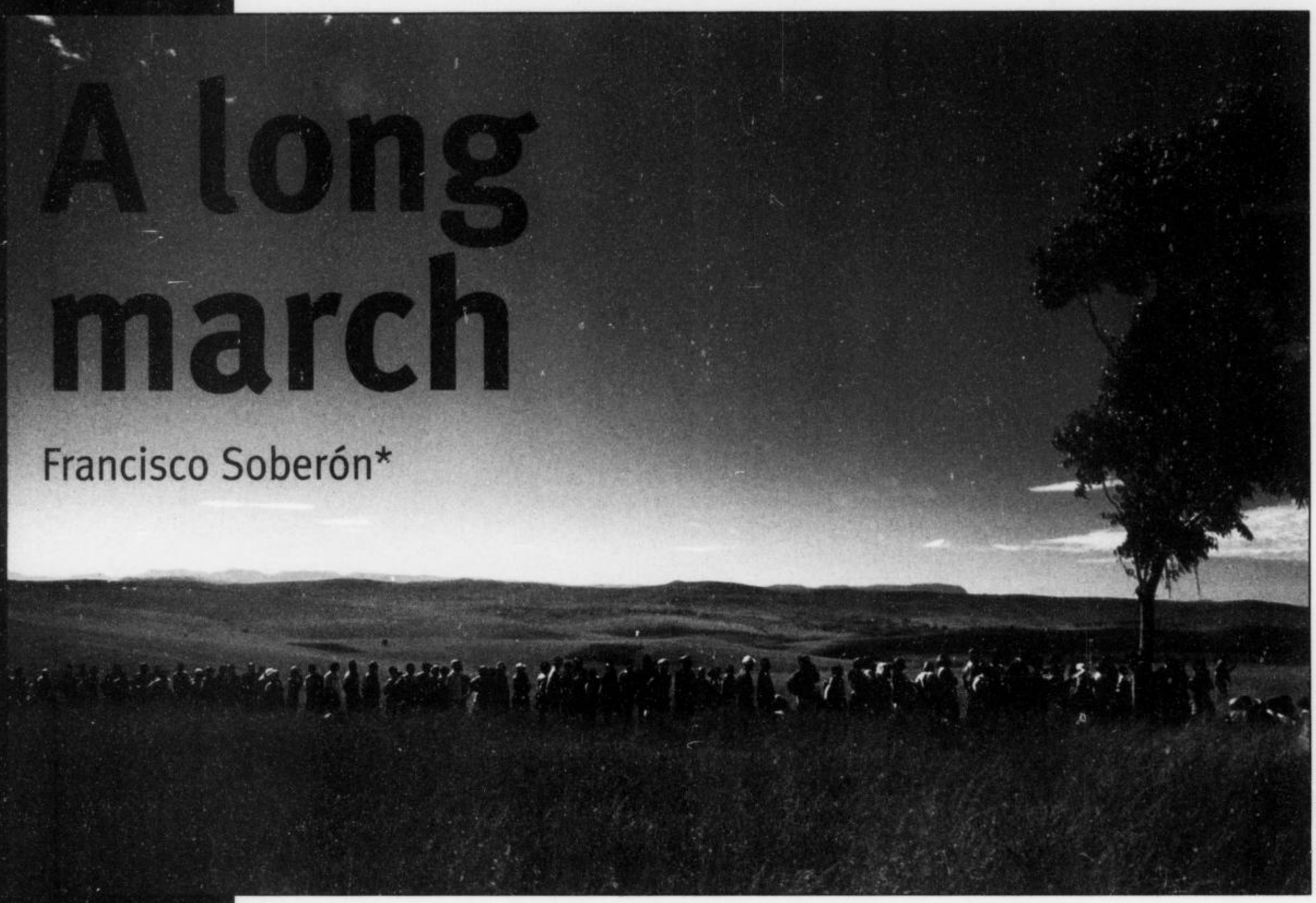
A long march

Francisco Soberón*



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Until 1994, only whites could vote in South Africa. Above: waiting on line in Transkei to cast ballots in the country's first non-racial elections.

As the world changes, so does the defense of human rights. International civil society is mobilizing in reaction to new threats to the gains already made

The world is going through a period of far-reaching upheaval. Armed conflicts, flagrant and systematic violations of human rights and the denial of fundamental freedoms continue to make headlines in various parts of the globe.

What parameters would help us take stock of the current situation regarding these rights and freedoms? Let us deliberately leave aside the quantitative view of things, which sets out to put a figure on the violations and outrages committed every day. This sort of guesswork is misleading, for there can be no doubt that there are countless situations midway between the absence of killing, abduction and arbitrary detention and the wholesale application of human rights—situations where the fact that no crime has been committed does not necessarily mean that justice prevails. Intimidation and blackmail can also create a semblance of order.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its Covenants and other international instruments and mechanisms are the normative and theoretical framework of tangible results and a systematic broadening of the concept of human rights over the past 50 years. Approved in 1948 by the international community as a common set of rules recognizing the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all people in all countries, the Universal Declaration was, in its day, a response to the global clamour for an end to the horrors of world war. Subsequently, the struggle for human rights was also a powerful weapon in the demise of totalitarian regimes such as those in Eastern Europe and of bloody military dictatorships on every continent. It also served to curb the authoritarian behaviour of governments formally considered democratic. At times, this struggle has borne the seeds of democracy, not just in terms of a system of government but of a forum for exercising fundamental freedoms. We all remember how international public opinion, with its insistent demands for human rights, contributed to the fall of regimes like those of Marcos in the Philippines, Somoza in Nicaragua, Pinochet in Chile, Pol Pot in Cambodia and apartheid in South Africa.

"All rights for all" is the basic message of the

'All duties lie in this one: do not treat others in such a way that would make you suffer if you received the same treatment.'

Mahabarata, India

* President of the Human Rights Organization of Peru, Vice-President of the International Federation of Human Rights

Universal Declaration which continues to be the source of inspiration and the standard by which we measure our successes. There is not a single country that denies its validity and all countries have subscribed to it. Yet, does this signify anything more than mere formal recognition? When countries ratify the Universal Declaration, they agree to implement the rights explicitly set forth in its articles, to ensure that they are applied and to sanction those who violate them. There is a tendency all over the world to incorporate these international legal instruments into national law. But the weakness of national judicial systems and the widespread corruption of political authorities are such that the effective application of these international instruments is nothing more than a mere aspiration. Thus, it is not so much the existence of constitutional texts which defines democracy but the establishment of the rule of law, with authorities and means of recourse, which guarantee their application for the benefit of citizens.

Even so, in the face of critical and vigilant public opinion no country, government or political, military or judicial authority would now go so far as to deny the existence of these fundamental rights. Indeed, the most significant progress made in recent years lies in the level of awareness attained by millions of individuals all over the world. As we have seen in many peasant communities in the Andean region of Latin America, citizens of the most far-flung corners of the earth who have never heard of the Universal Declaration still demand "human rights".

The existence, drive and combative spirit of thousands of associations—ranging from the relatives of victims of violations to organizations with an international scope of activity—have led to victory in battles which seemed doomed. We are witnessing the emergence of a global human rights culture based on implicit recognition of the fact that citizens' organizations exercise the right to keep watch over the behaviour of states.

The energy of thousands of has led to victory in battles which seemed doomed

This increasingly keen awareness on the part of civil society is bound to have an impact on government policies and lays the groundwork for advancing international legal machinery and instruments. One obvious example is women's struggle to overcome discrimination. The United Nations' adoption in 1967 of a special declaration on women's rights, as well as the Beijing Conference and the implementation of the measures resulting from it, are some of the international milestones in the social advancement of women. They are largely due to the work of activists in the field.

However, the emergence of a worldwide ethical awareness is accompanied by new social ►

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Major treaties, mixed results

If all the United Nations' member states decided to observe the international rules on human rights enacted since the 1948 Universal Declaration, their citizens would be protected from the vagaries of arbitrary power. Tens of conventions, covenants and declarations aimed at protecting individuals and groups from political and economic violence have been signed and ratified in the last half-century.

Yet living conditions are deteriorating for much of the world's population. Contrary to what that might suggest, since the early 1950s the United Nations has undertaken efforts to strengthen international legislation with regard to economic and social rights. Those are the areas covered by the first treaties, including the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (1948), which was soon followed by the Equal Remuneration Convention (1951) and the Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour (1957). Civil rights have not been left out. The Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War was signed in 1949 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination adopted in 1965. International texts also upheld women's rights very early on. They include the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women and the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.

But it took the United Nations until 1966 to adopt two crucial texts, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Since then, international normative action on human rights has continued making headway, from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was unanimously adopted in 1989. In addition to the 1948 Universal Declaration, the two covenants of 1966 and countless non-binding declarations, over 30 conventions have been adopted since 1968.

Most states have signed and ratified these texts, which they are bound to observe. But that does not mean they do, especially since they may exercise their right to opt out of certain clauses while agreeing to others. For example, almost all the Muslim countries have expressed reservations on the conventions relative to women, effectively making those texts meaningless. Very few states have agreed to conventions in their entirety and incorporated their provisions into national legislation. The rest have reluctantly signed on and use all the international procedures at their disposal to make them null and void at home. ■

cleavages that are transforming the planet's political and economic landscape. Some of the most blatant features include the stepped-up pace of globalization, the prominence given to market forces at the expense of their social and governmental regulation, the superiority of productivity and competitiveness over equity, the weakening of the nation-state and the creation of new economic blocs.

For the moment, globalization has not meant that everybody has access to common universal values. While exacerbating social exclusion and division, it is also fostering a context conducive to the strengthening of international mechanisms for protecting human rights. That is one of the main ambiguities of the present situation which will have to be borne in mind in the future, since it is changing people's perceptions of their rights as well as the environment in which they can be exercised.

The question arises, then, whether basic freedoms and rights have made any significant progress in the past ten years of liberal crusading. Generally speaking, the answer is "no", among other things because the strong state is being replaced not so much by a small and efficient state as by a weak one, which tends to govern on the basis of political corruption and cronyism.

In this new context, it is necessary to highlight two aspects essential to the progress of human rights in the world: the struggle to prevent human rights violations from going unpunished and the recognition of the indivisible nature of those rights.

It is common to find judicial and propaganda manoeuvres, often illegal and violent, aimed at protecting the intellectual, physical or political authors of dreadful crimes committed against individuals and humanity. Impunity has come to be granted by law, so that military authorities are exonerated from responsibility. In most cases, the granting of impunity has been the outcome of negotiations between democratically elected governments and soldiers surrendering power, or between rebel military organizations and transition governments after periods of domestic violence. This was the case between the guerrillas of El Salvador and Guatemala and their respective governments and armed forces.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration provides an opportunity to consider the gains made

Practical steps must be taken to do away with the problem of impunity, so that the truth will be known, justice done and appropriate compensation granted to the victims or their relatives. To turn the page, it must be read beforehand.

This is likewise related to the establishment of a new international order, since the mechanisms of impunity and arbitrariness also act at the international level. The major powers often change the rules according to their political interests or economic imperatives by condemning or pardoning the crimes committed by countries, depending on whether they are "enemies" or potential "allies".

The principle of indivisibility implies, in the first place, rejection of a ranking order of human rights, as well as recognition of the give-and-take relationship between individual freedoms and the conditions essential for exercising them. In this sense, one of the most disturbing new trends is the loss of economic, social and cultural rights affecting workers in almost every country. The decline in earning levels, deplorable working conditions, instability and the loss of welfare benefits by millions of people, all of which are reflected in growing social exclusion, are a significant step backwards. Underdevelopment creates a climate conducive to violations of fundamental rights and inhibits the emergence of a civil society capable of entering into dialogue with the state. Not only does this foster individualism or an "every man for himself" attitude, but it hinders the development of legal protection existing for civil and political rights.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on 10 December 1998 affords an opportunity to consider the gains made and to renew the pledge of the international community and citizens to engage in the enormous task before us. Newspapers and television remind us that there is no reason for complacency or self-satisfaction. There are, however, grounds for hope in the effective and increasingly forceful mobilization of human rights activists in national leagues or international organizations, often at the risk of their lives. This confirms that people are no longer prepared to leave the fulfilment of their aspirations for a more just, fraternal and caring world to governments or international authorities. ■

© Drawing by Quino

Authoritarian governments never run out of ways to keep a grip on their people.

'Do not do unto your neighbour what you find hateful. That is the core of the Law. The rest is only commentary.'

The Talmud, Judaism

For an end to double standards

Emma Bonino*

Emma Bonino, who was named a European Commissioner in 1995, is active on many fronts. A human rights militant since the beginning of her political career, she advocates a new system of international relations that is a far cry from the prevailing cynicism

What kind of world are we living in today? The start of the 1990s saw the collapse of a global system divided into two spheres of influence, whose only merit was that it managed to circumscribe conflicts geographically for almost half a century. But the world of the 1945 Yalta Agreement was rooted in terror.

In 1989 and 1990, the geopolitical system changed, but no new planetary vision emerged to fill the resulting gap. Those who thought at the time that communism would automatically be replaced everywhere by democracy were wrong. Instead it was nationalism, containing the seeds of ethnic tension, which thrived in the ruins of the old system. The result has been an increase in the number of conflicts whose perpetrators escape unpunished if their actions happen to fit the interests of the main forces at work.

For the old practice of double standards—a modulated assessment of how basic human rights are respected in different countries—has hardly been affected by the upheavals of the late 1980s. The 1990s have marked a geopolitical transition, but nobody has been able to respond to the new imbalances by replacing, as far as possible, the force of arms by the force of law.

So human rights and democracy have not advanced very far as a result of the change of scene. Despite more and more declarations and seminars on the subject, they are still not an important factor in the conduct of international relations. You still do not have to be a democrat to be have friends in the West. Before 1990, it was enough to be anti-communist to be one of our allies. This meant that when communism collapsed, we were landed with a number of "friends" who were both useless and unpresentable.

Then there was the "anti-terrorist" label. Terrorism exists, of course, and it is dangerous, but it was enough to proclaim oneself anti-terrorist to become one of our friends. Iraq's Saddam Hussein, backed beyond all logic because he was fighting a "terrorist" country (Iran), symbolized this new blindness in the 1980s.

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Emma Bonino

These days, to be a friend of the West, you just need to apply the rules of good governance and the market economy. The problem is that in each case the condition for winning Western support may be just, and even necessary, but it is never sufficient.

At the same time, we have come up with more and more excuses for democracy supposedly not being possible. This is seen, for example, by claiming that Africa is too poor to be democratic or by giving a stamp of approval, especially in Asia, to the alibi of cultural relativism—something which is totally contradicted by the facts. As soon as they are given a choice, Asians behave like everyone else. In 1992, the people of Myanmar voted overwhelmingly for Aung San Suu Kyi and against the military regime.

The ultimate altar on which we are ready to sacrifice whatever necessary is that of stability, a much more presentable notion than a straightforward defense of our economic interests. There again, the West is prepared to hand out good conduct certificates to those who look as if they can guarantee this. ►

You still don't have to be a democrat to have friends in the West

* European commissioner for humanitarian affairs, fisheries and consumer policy

© Viktor Korotayev/Reuters/Max PPP, Paris

In Baghdad, families wait outside a humanitarian centre for aid.

War is obviously a big obstacle to development, but beware of the stability of graveyards.

So we go on making sacrifices to "realpolitik". Only the excuses we make for it have changed—yesterday it was anti-communism, today it is good governance. But is this truly realpolitik? Are we not in reality yielding to an authoritarian illusion by being more attracted to strong leaders than to solid institutions?

The best example of this perversion is found in the attitudes we have long had towards the Asian "tiger" countries and which are based exclusively on their economic performance. It is wrong to insist, as people do, that economic growth automatically leads to democracy. In many Asian countries, the kind of growth policies chosen have not only undermined the chances for sustainable development but have also reduced the possibilities of a non-violent and legal transition to democracy.

But we do not learn the lessons of history. We had barely stopped fooling ourselves about the Asian "tigers" when we came up with African "lions"—countries where nobody says a word about the fact that these new friends of ours ban political parties or that some of them have even developed the quaint notion of "democracy without parties".

An international policy based on respect for laws, agreements and rules is the only possible course

Double standards are a vital tool in this conception of realpolitik. Yesterday's enemy can become today's best friend, as our priorities change. But to my mind true realpolitik cannot be reduced to these kinds of contortions. Only a diplomacy based on simple values recognized by everyone—including democracy and respect for basic human rights—can be conducted in the long term and defended with any dignity before the whole world.

"Realists" are wrong when they say we must choose between realpolitik and idealism. If a policy is to be sustainable, it must based on an ideal. Taking into account the extent of our economic and political interests, I am convinced that it is in our interest to promote democracy. Development of economic relations calls for stability. And democratic institutions are infinitely more stable than dictatorships.

So we have to come up with new ways of coping with geopolitical and economic constraints. What we in the European Union call critical dialogue allows us to use a panoply of diplomatic tools without resorting systematically to sanctions and isolation in a vain attempt to bring certain dictatorships to heel. An embargo on technology can be effective, but no dictator has ever been troubled by an embargo on food or medical supplies. Such drastic embargoes can in fact stir up nationalist resentment among the people who suffer under them.

Sanctions are certainly an instrument in international relations and should be used when all attempts at dialogue have been exhausted, but only as one of the last resorts, when a display of firmness is needed as part of a dialogue.

Europe has withdrawn from Afghanistan because any talks with the Taliban are fruitless right now. Our presence there was just an alibi for them from the moment when humanitarian organizations were prevented from working in the country. Elsewhere, it is not yet time to slam the door. Leaving a country should be the very last step in our policy.

Such a process can get bad press because it can never be straightforward. It is a method which uses gradual steps and needs to be explained thoroughly to be clearly understood. The other party or adversary, along with public opinion, has to be kept continually informed as to what stage discussions are at.

This is the only way we can avoid being accused of once again using a double standard by imposing sanctions on some and not on others. The problem is that our diplomatic practices and the absence of a common European foreign policy means we have no clear and effective positions on these matters.

The big challenge as the end of the century approaches is therefore to change the meaning we have given to realpolitik. This would be a real cultural revolution. We shall not be able to do it overnight. If we were to break off relations with every country which violated human rights, we would no longer have links with about three-quarters of the world's governments. We could even find reasons to break off relations with some European countries.

Respect for human rights is something which grows one day at a time. Unfortunately, the political establishment in developed countries hardly considers it a priority and major political parties are deafeningly silent on such issues. Their silence weakens democracy everywhere, including in our own countries. It is time for us to make a bigger place for the rule of law in politics.

An international policy based on respect for laws, agreements and rules is the only one possible. We must know its intricacies so we can promote it with every passing day. The journey is a slow one, but progress is being made.

The two ad hoc tribunals on former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have chalked up modest successes, but successes all the same. Perpetrators of genocide and other war criminals can no longer mock the international community. As human rights activists, we must draw strength from these achievements so we can prove wrong those who favour a short-sighted realpolitik. I am convinced there is no other way forward. ■

Televised genocide

Rony Brauman*

Fifty years after the Second World War, the international community is watching crimes against humanity in Rwanda and Yugoslavia

© Nadia Benchallal/Contact, Paris

Bosnia, 1995: refugees from Srebrenica arriving in Tuzla.

Between the Leninakan earthquake in December 1988 and the Gulf War in 1991, the world seemed to have undergone a fundamental change. A global society was said to be emerging with a "new international humanitarian order". The United Nations General Assembly adopted its earliest resolutions on humanitarian assistance just a few days before the first intervention of this kind on Soviet soil after the deadly tremor in Armenia. The following year opened a new era, with the fall of the Berlin wall, the rising number of pro-democracy movements in Africa and Security Council resolutions imposing the help of humanitarian organizations to save the Kurds of Iraq. The end of the Cold War was supposed to usher in an epoch of peace and democracy made possible and strengthened by the information revolution.

The possibility of "seeing" world events unfold live on television fulfilled the dream of both post-war periods. As in 1918 and in 1945, the cry "never again" rang out in the 1990s. But it did happen again. Even as international organizations were celebrating the advent of a world re-united, fascistic militias began dismembering Yugoslavia along ethnic lines while a racist government in Rwanda unleashed death squads, setting off a frenzy of genocidal killing. Then there were the deadly implosion of Somali society, civil strife in post-Soviet Afghanistan and the war that has ravaged southern Sudan for 15 years, to mention just a few of the most devastating conflicts.

Could the new world order prevent these crimes from reoccurring—crimes against humanity which the international community had long thought banished at Nuremberg after the Second World War? Certainly not, unless we assume that they were just consequences of the East-West conflict or the results of obscure misunderstandings. These assumptions ignore the central importance of local political factors. And yet this is precisely the illusion maintained by a Western conception of the world which is constantly presented as universal.

This same denial of politics continued, although in different forms, in the crises of Bosnia and Rwanda. These conflicts were not a local stage for a global power struggle. They were about battling tribes driven by obscure ethnic impulses that seemed to date from another age. They were no longer represented as geopolitical conflicts in which peoples were held hostage in a rivalry that had nothing to do with them. Instead, they were presented by images of chaos and furor, in which tribes in the grip of primitive passions slaughter each other for enigmatic gains.

However, this perspective forgets that the world wars started as fires ignited and stoked by Europe to the point of suicide. Other people's wars, like those raging today, are always considered insane. It also forgets that technology, including communication technology, is morally neutral. In other words, it can be used for high-minded as well as evil purposes. Lastly, it also disregards the fact that while Western countries, and more broadly the international powers, cannot be held accountable for all the horrors of the world, they bear part of the responsibility—one that this metaphysical and moralizing vision conveniently avoids.

We live in virtual and widespread proximity due to technological progress that has supposedly turned the world into a "global village". Everyone is everyone else's neighbour. But the possibility of learning about our contemporaries' misfortunes as they happen seems to be more overwhelming than stimulating, probably because it insidiously undermines our capacity for indignation. Perhaps most importantly, it underscores our weakness all the more cruelly. We are simultaneously "giants" in terms of information and "dwarfs" in terms of action.

The utopian dream of a world made transparent by technology as well as the pseudo-realism underlining the political actions and reasons of states represent two symmetrical ways of denying politics. We need to move beyond these two tactics used to retreat from the world. Every day, we must re-invent politics in constructing a common world and a forum for deliberation. This is by no means a recipe for overcoming destructive impulses, but the only way we can predict and prepare for them. It may also be called responsibility. ■

'A tendency towards tyranny and mutual oppression is an innate part of human nature.'

Ibn Khaldoun, 1332-1406, North Africa

* Doctors Without Borders Foundation

Globalization:

Fifty years after the 1948 Universal Declaration, is there a new generation of human rights? If so, how does it relate to the rights enshrined half a century ago?

'In a free nation, it often does not matter whether individuals reason well or poorly; it is enough that they reason. From this springs the liberty that guarantees the effects of that reasoning.'

Montesquieu, 1689-1755, France

The international situation in the late 1990s demonstrates more than ever the indivisibility of all rights—economic, social, civil, political and cultural—in the broadest sense. We have reached a critical juncture where the number of rights is increasing while their wording and practical application are changing. The ideals which inspired the Universal Declaration may be devalued and the principles it has tried to protect used to serve special interests lest we focus on the stakes, players, institutions, strategies and interests involved in defending them.

Since the 1980s, the planetary interdependence stemming from globalization has increased debate and media coverage of human rights in many arenas. The recommendations that came out of conferences held during the present decade—Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul—have usually been based on an affirmation of rights: rights to a clean environment, socio-economic rights, the rights of women and the right to housing.

Since the 1980s, planetary interdependence has fueled the human rights debate

A growing number of people and organizations are involved in these issues, which is helping to raise awareness of human rights and to spread more information about them in specific areas of concern. But these sometimes powerful, sometimes weak players have conflicting positions and interests and advocate strategies that do not always coincide. Interdependence does not necessarily mean establishing symmetrical relationships and equal opportunities. The various forms that globalization is taking and their destabilizing effects on social relationships may even explain the growing concern with human rights.

These "new rights" are appearing in a particular context, which explains why there is an urgent need to defend them and accounts for certain problems relating to how they have emerged. For they must be defended without dividing up the issues and diverting attention from the political and social relationships that lead to violations.

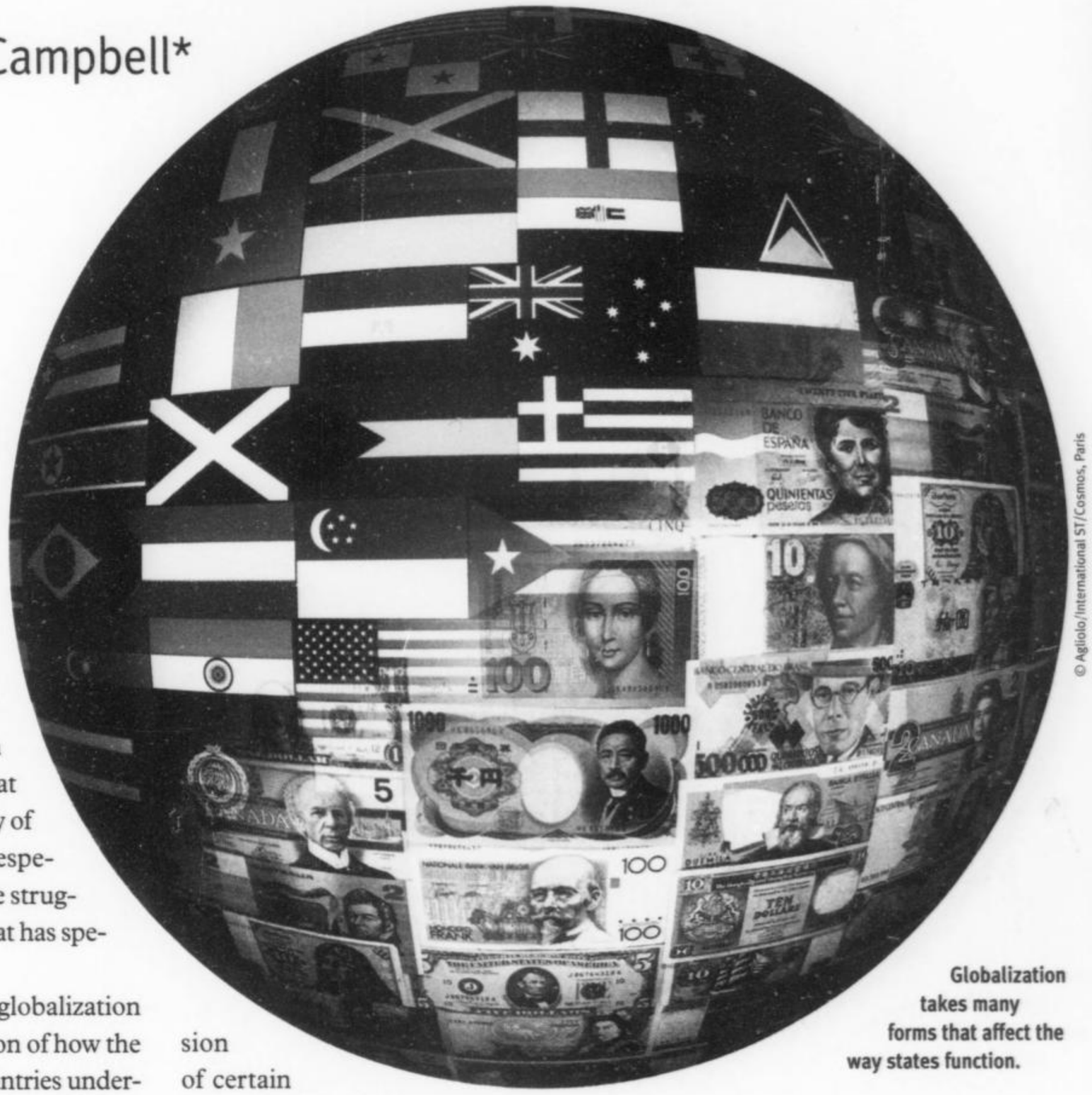
We can tell if we are really looking at the emergence of new rights or whether we are just seeing an updating of the 1948 Universal Declaration by studying the various forms globalization takes and current strategies of economic growth. More specifically, we must focus on the new forms of exclusion and marginalization that characterize a whole chain of relationships from the international to the regional, national and grassroots levels. We must re-examine our conceptions of globalization and economic growth to try and understand the complexity of the current process and the emergence of new human rights demands.

Most economists argue that globalization is the outcome of unavoidable adjustments to the new rules of international competition and to the laws of the market-place which supposedly ensure the optimum distribution of resources around the world. But globalization should be seen more as an eminently political process involving negotiations and struggles for influence and power engineered and institutionalized by players such as governments, transnational corporations and multilateral financial institutions.

What is more, the globalization of financial markets and that of goods and services has different social, economic and political implications depending on the region. Even though they are all part of the same worldwide process, these different situations have their own special features, which must be taken into account when it comes to questioning human rights and the necessity of defending them.

what is at stake?

Bonnie Campbell*



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Globalization takes many forms that affect the way states function.

The liberalization underway goes hand-in-hand with a programmed withdrawal by the state from certain areas such as planning, production and social reform and a re-orientation of its involvement in others, like redistribution, regulation and mediation. The aim is to encourage special economic growth strategies based on the promotion of private interests. That has helped to undermine the legitimacy of states already beset by fiscal crisis—especially in the South, where countries are struggling with "structural adjustment". That has special implications for human rights.

The growing politicization of the globalization process, and especially the politicization of how the crisis is managed in the developing countries undergoing structural adjustment, has led to a redefinition of the state's role. But in both the North and the South, economic recovery based on the private sector involves special forms of integration with global markets and new relationships with transnational corporations.

Domestically, reform programmes that seek to create a set of economic and social relationships in accordance with international norms of productivity, capital returns and competitiveness are directly or indirectly attacking long-held rights, where they exist, such as employment and social security benefits. The aim is to help redistribute resources from "less productive" sectors—social welfare, health and education, for example—to "more productive" ones. That shift comes at an incalculable social cost because it involves dismantling rules by which society has operated over the last several decades.

During the 1990s, as the marginalization and exclusion of certain social categories increased, the Bretton Woods international financial institutions gave some thought to the plight of "target groups"—women, old people, children and the handicapped. Special measures were adopted in their favour, but without questioning the economic programmes which had helped to worsen their situation in the first place.

The battle for new rights is actually a struggle for the redistribution of power

More recently, the World Bank's 1997 World Development Report[1], which focuses on the redefinition of the state's role, contains a chart showing the different functions the bank thinks the state should fulfill. The role of "ensuring social equity" is not presented as an end in itself—and even less as a social or economic right—but as a means to stabilize and consolidate a model of economic growth whose logical progress can only increase inequality and so lead to potential violations.

Poverty and the various dysfunctions of society ▶

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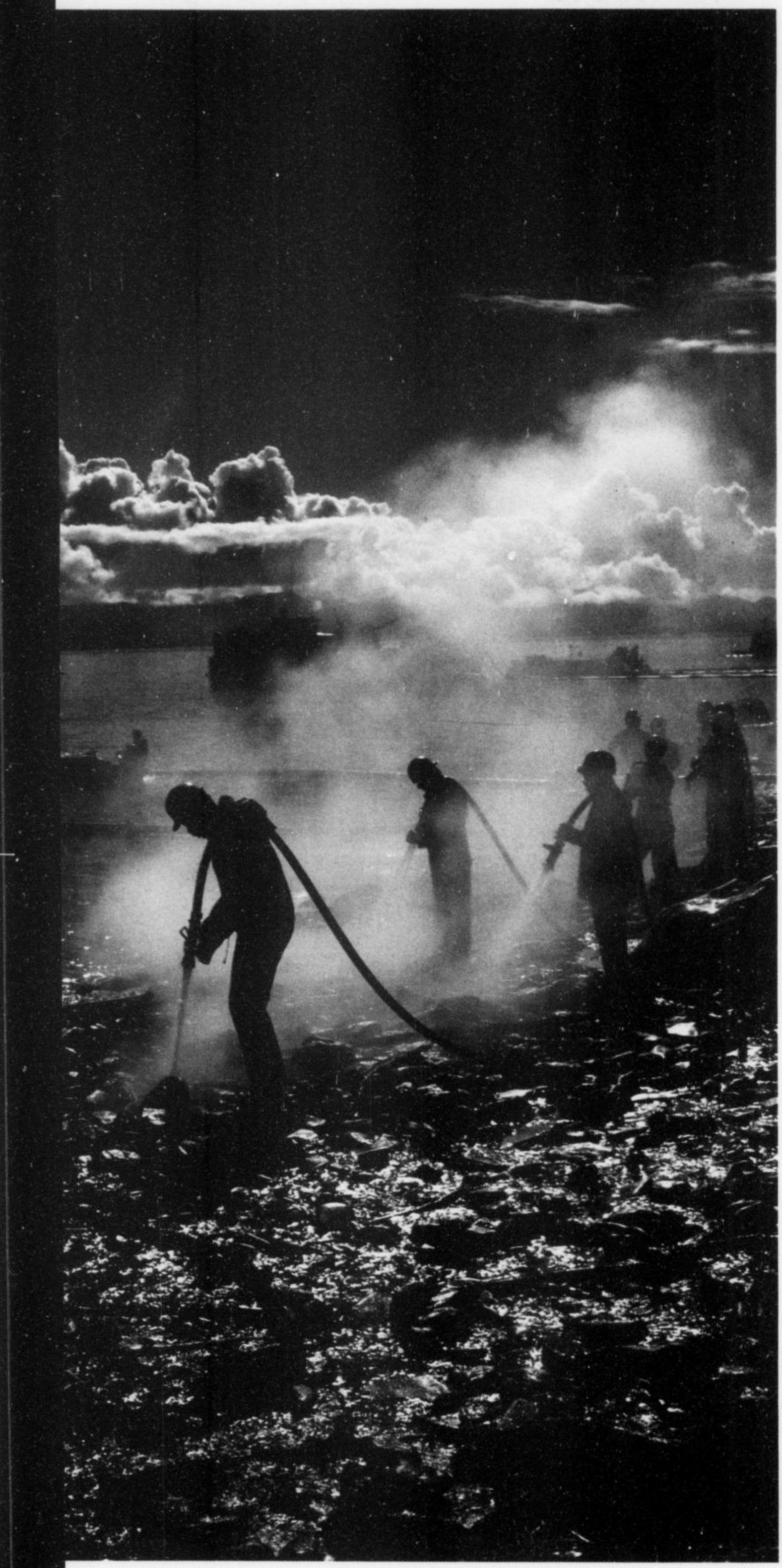

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Alaska: cleaning up a beach after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989.

worldwide are partly rooted in a selective and inequitable form of social and political regulation, which means that the battle to win new human rights is actually a struggle for the redistribution of power—an eminently political matter. By presenting economic, and now institutional reforms from a purely technical point of view, the multilateral and national institutions are dodging key questions with regard to the control of the development process. Who controls it? What is their aim? In whose interests? It seems illusory to redefine measures for promoting social and economic rights, including the aspiration to broaden their scope, before the content and purpose of the growth those institutions recommend is made clear.

The increasingly aggressive and multi-faceted intervention by multilateral and bilateral aid institutions in social and political matters is an attempt to reduce political processes to technical management. Those institutions and their officials say there are certain "non-negotiable" norms dictated by economic theory alone. The result is an attempt to take politics out of the process, denying the legitimacy of political goals. That is the context in which human rights must now be placed and in which the growing role of transnational companies—with their freedom of action, influence on public policy-making and thus their power—can be understood.

But the social, political and economic impact of outside players varies depending on many factors, including domestic political situations. They range from a state of law in which legally-recognized bodies may publicly challenge rules about basic employment, health and environmental standards, to countries where state structures have been weakened, their legitimacy undermined, and where there are few, if any, fora for public discussion.

In this context the major transnational corporations, especially those that sell consumer goods in wealthy countries, have been busy promoting the establishment of codes of conduct or ethics to avoid the kind of boycotts that have occurred in Europe and the United States. But most codes, when they exist, have major loopholes, including a lack of means to enforce them, of effective oversight and of sanctions in the event of violations. Consequently, the adoption of such codes can actually be a smokescreen for human rights abuses by large corporations.

At the same time, the process of globalization and the questions raised about the state's role in redistributing resources, along with its withdrawal from many areas of political and social responsibility, has underscored the emergence of new players making their voices heard for the first time. They are mobilizing and organizing to demand new rights in new

ways, including rights for the homeless, young people, the elderly and the handicapped, the right to breath clean air, to drink uncontaminated water and to eat food that is not poisoned by pesticides. In some North American cities, car windscreen washers have formed groups to defend their right to earn a little money.

In many respects, these demands update several articles in the 1948 Universal Declaration. Some of them—the right to access personal data, to a healthy life without genetic engineering and to a clean environment—reflect technological and scientific advances. But again, the question might be asked: who controls the benefits of such technology and science? Who decides how they shall be used? To which ends and in whose interests?

The impact of the current globalization process is above all political

In this sense, we may be seeing less the emergence of a new generation of human rights and more the recognition that, in the context of globalization, defending them must take into account many places and interests in space and time. In other words, the issues and the demands take different forms depending on the place and the moment. As relationships become increasingly complex, there is a chance that codes and regulations will appear that seek to legitimize special interests, methods and strategies in the name of human rights while they may actually give rise to the abuse of those rights or the endorsement of a new and unjust balance of power. As politicization of the issues increases, so do the chances of co-opting human rights and seeing them used to serve the interests of a special few.

The impact of human rights on the current globalization process is above all a political matter that requires identifiable players to build different power relationships at different levels. Emphasizing the players and the responsibilities not only shows that development and defense of human rights are closely linked, but also that the defense of new and old rights—which are inseparable—depends on taking back control of development strategies and of the power needed to defend them. ■

1 World Bank, *The State in a Changing World, The World Development Report*, 1997. Washington D.C., 1997.

'Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else.'

The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, 1789, France.

Pandora's box

Everyone agrees that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a sacred cow and no one would dream—officially, at least—of replacing it with a new version that is more in step with the times. But the semblance of agreement on a founding text does not by any stretch of the imagination mean it meets with unanimous acceptance. On the contrary, the Declaration has come under fierce attack, and the criticisms have become more pointed in the past few years. As if to relativize the document's value, several regions of the world have drawn up human rights charters based on their own principles, which do not appear in the United Nations text. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Islamic Charter of Human Rights reflect a conception of human rights espoused by leaders of countries in those regions and by at least some of the people who live in them.

Between the United Nations human rights conferences in Teheran in 1968 and Vienna in 1993, as well as in other international fora, the organization's Declaration came under fierce criticism. At times some have even publicly asked whether the 1948 document could be "touched up", since it cannot be replaced altogether. They argue in favour of including the concerns of cultures overlooked by the text's original authors, blinded as they were by a Western world view. It would be the height of irony if the 1948 Declaration were made universal at last by taking into account specific cutural features of individual countries.

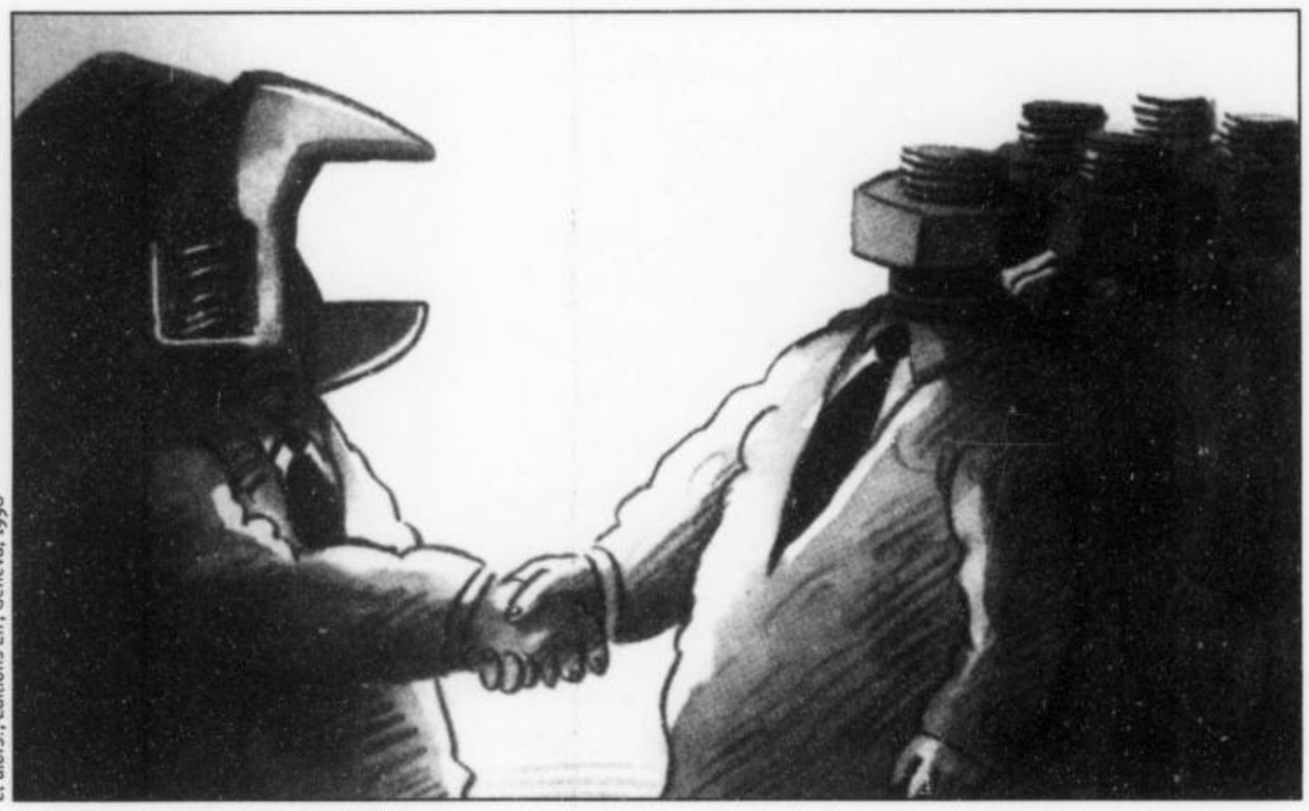
Two sides soon confronted each other. The advocates of universality, who consider it dangerous to renegotiate the Declaration, have clashed with those who would introduce clauses relating to their specific cultures, some of which have only a distant kinship with respect for rights of the individual. The standoff came to a head in the first half of the nineties. In Vienna and elsewhere, several Asian countries that challenged the Declaration's universal character in the name of Asian values joined forces with the most conservative Muslim states to oppose the West's efforts to have the document accepted as universal.

Each side actually used human rights to justify its own political transgressions. The West has invoked them to officially carry out international police operations since the end of the Cold War, while the opposing camp casually violated them for the sake of "values" that are often their negation. Such instrumentalization has hardly served the cause of human rights. But it has driven home the point that a discussion on updating the Declaration would open up a Pandora's box of unknown demons. The most recent international texts acknowledge the legitimacy of "cultural and religious specificity", often to the great displeasure of many human rights groups. However, the universal character of individual rights has been solemnly upheld.

The relative lull in the confrontation between advocates of universality and partisans of cultural relativism is cause for celebration but, regrettably, political exploitation of the human rights issue has overshadowed the real debate. Many activists, in the North and the South, believe it would be useful to consolidate human rights by involving all the world's cultures in legitimizing them. By exploring all the various facets of human rights, a common vision might emerge of the human condition and the necessary respect it is due that would bring peoples together instead of drive them apart. That is the foundation, those advocates argue, on which to build the universal human rights of tomorrow. ■

Sophie Bessis

Poor relations



© Drawing by Selçuk, Turkey, taken from *Un demi-siècle de droits de l'homme, et alors?*, Editions EIP, Geneva, 1998

Tightening the bolts on economic and social rights.

As the gap between rich and poor widens, the have-nots are demanding more respect for economic and social rights, which are often given short shrift

"The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis." The June 1993 United Nations World Conference in Vienna added one more resolution to the long list adopted over the years when it reminded the signatory states of the Universal Declaration of their duty to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights—food, shelter, work, health and education—just as much as civil and political rights—freedom, security and justice. The initiative was critical because economic, social and cultural rights have always been sidelined for historical and ideological reasons.

In the 1950s the debate raged over drafting a covenant that would give the Declaration legal force. René Cassin of France favoured a single document, but the Western and Communist blocs were opposed. The Western countries emphasized political rights while the Eastern bloc, backed by several developing nations, gave priority to economic rights.

A compromise was reached in 1966, when two covenants were drawn up—one on civil and political rights, to go into effect immediately, another on economic, social and cultural rights, which would gradually enter into force and has so far been ratified by 137 countries.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that "each State... undertakes to take steps... to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized...." Governments, especially in the developing world, often take advantage of the ambiguous wording to justify their non-observance of the treaty, says Philippe Texier, the French expert on the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights set up in 1985. Most countries ignore it, he adds.

Texier, a legal expert, recommends an optional protocol that, like the one on political rights, would empower the committee to review complaints from individuals or groups. But he admits that "respect for political rights, such as a ban on torture, is easier to verify than, for example, respect for the right to be decently housed."

Committee chairman Philip Alston of Australia says, "it is essential that such a procedure be created in order to provide the opportunity for the development of some jurisprudence relating to economic, social and cultural rights. In the continuing absence of such jurisprudence, the second-class status of those rights will inevitably be maintained."

Maribel Wolf, the United Nations representative of the French non-governmental organization Terre des Hommes, says that "the purpose of being able to process such complaints is not so much to possibly impose sanctions but to have the opportunity to publicly expose violations of economic rights."

"Governments don't like that," she says, and indeed they seem to show scant interest in the proposal. So far only six countries have responded to the draft protocol produced by the committee. Four of them—Cyprus, Syria, Finland and Ecuador—are fairly or very much in favour, while two—Germany and Canada—have expressed doubts.

'It is the job of civil society to defend economic and social rights'

"Since the governments of the rich countries have abdicated their responsibilities and hidden behind the excuse of the market economy, and elites in the developing countries refuse to redistribute wealth, it's the job of civil society to defend these rights," says Wolf.

She is cheered by Amnesty International's recent though small shift in that direction. Until now the human rights watchdog has primarily focused on individual freedoms. Weary of feeling "looked down upon" by political rights experts, Wolf claims the label "human rights activist" just as strongly as they do.

"We must stop thinking of political rights as an entitlement while economic and social rights are a mere premise or a utopian dream," says Colombian lawyer and human rights expert Alirio Uribe Munoz. The fate of every individual's economic, social and cultural rights depends on it. ■

Emmanuel Abadie

'No human quality is more intolerable in everyday life or, in fact, less tolerated than intolerance.'

Giacomo Leopardi, 1798-1837, Italy

© POOL-Dusan Vranic/Reuters/Max PPP, Paris

8 October, 1997: some of the most wanted Bosnian Croats accused of war crimes standing before the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

A decisive victory

In July, 120 countries voted to establish the International Criminal Court (ICC), which will judge crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. William R. Pace led the coalition of non-governmental organizations that campaigned for its creation

■ **What came out of the Rome conference?**

William Pace: The ICC Treaty represents one of the most monumental advances in the rule of law in international affairs since the adoption of the Charter founding the United Nations. In addition, the Rome ICC treaty will be seen as a watershed moment in the post-Cold-War world, for it is a great step forward for international democracy.

The 800 organizations of the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court will begin campaigning immediately for 60 state ratifications of the ICC Treaty by 31 October 2001, thus permitting the statute to create the court to enter into force by the start of the twenty-first century, on 31 December 2001.

■ **Who will bring cases to the ICC and how will the prosecutor initiate investigations?**

W. P.: Investigations can be initiated by state party complaints, by referrals from the Security Council, and by the ICC prosecutor, who would be able to initiate a criminal investigation subject to appropriate judicial scrutiny. Testaments from victims could be the source of information from non-state sources for the prosecutor. Historic precedents in the rights of victims to participate, be protected, and seek reparations have been achieved in the ICC statute.

■ **Who will appoint the ICC judges and under what criteria will they be selected?**

W. P.: The ICC statute provides that the conference of states parties to the ICC treaty will be responsible for the appointment of the judges. High standards of legal qualifications, representation of the world's major legal systems, and equitable geographical representation are all mandated in the treaty.

■ **There is a possibility that countries which have signed the treaty can refuse to accept the war crimes clause for seven years. Do you think this is a serious limitation to the treaty?**

W. P.: I believe very few countries will opt out for the seven years. In the long run—no—this is not a serious limitation to the treaty—presuming this exception is not changed or extended by the Conference of States Parties to the statute.

■ **What role can NGOs and pro-ICC human rights groups play in their own countries and in nations which have not signed the treaty?**

W. P.: Our roles will be to continue to fight for peace and international justice. Our focus at the national level will be to work more closely with parliamentarians, national bar associations and others to advance the ratification process. Over time as the ICC comes into being our efforts will be to support the court and to monitor violations of international ►

In the rough stages

Despite the long list of difficulties facing the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), there is no denying their critical role in laying the groundwork for the ICC.

"There is an ethical dimension to bringing justice to the victims and to fulfilling a duty to the collective memory," said Claude Jorda, a French judge on the ICTY, in a public discussion on the tribunal's importance, which equally applies to the ICTR. Established by the United Nations Security Council in 1993 and 1994 respectively, the tribunals prosecute serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Based in The Hague (The Netherlands), the ICTY indicted 59 individuals, and 27 were in custody as of August 1998. Two men have been sentenced to five and 20 years of imprisonment.

The ICTR has indicted 35 men and detained 26 of them along with five suspects, as of September 1998. The accused include Jean Kambanda, prime minister of Rwanda during the genocide, along with senior government officials, media and business leaders. Located in Arusha (Tanzania), the tribunal handed down the first judgement on crime of genocide in September.

A lack of financial means, experience and international support partially explains the tribunals' weaknesses and the slow place of trials, particularly in Rwanda. Yet as many point out, the courts are like laboratories offering essential but painful lessons, such as the need to adequately involve victims. Most importantly, these tribunals cannot prevent war crimes, as seen with the Srebenica massacres of 1994, committed one year after the ICTY began its work. ■

humanitarian law wherever they occur, to provide information, research and assistance to victims, and to demand that national courts and the ICC investigate and prosecute those who commit crimes against humanity.

■ **During the negotiations, some countries expressed apprehensions that the ICC may undermine national sovereignty. What do you think about this?**

W. P.: A fundamental principle enshrined in the ICC statute is complementarity. The new court will not replace, but will complement national courts and legal systems which will remain primarily responsible. Also, extraordinary judicial and procedural safeguards—more than NGOs would have liked—have been built into the statute. They protect national sovereignty and guarantee against any kind of frivolous prosecution.

■ **Do you think the United States, which voted against the treaty, will try to sabotage it?**

W. P.: It is a great danger and it would be a great tragedy if the United States were to adopt policies and laws to sabotage the ICC. Most experts and diplomats hope that the US will support the ICC once US leaders better understand the adopted statute, see what a great new instrument of international justice the ICC will be for the Security Council and the world community, and realize how nations with functioning civil and military legal systems which investigate alleged crimes against humanity committed by their nationals have nothing to fear from the ICC.

■ **Is there any possibility of countries which voted against the establishment of the ICC, signing the treaty in future?**

W. P.: Of course there is. South Africa played an indispensable leadership role in this historic treaty and five years ago South Africa was still a pariah nation. Scores of nations from Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America which were ruled by brutal political and military regimes in the recent past provided essential support and leadership in Rome. The integrity and determination of these nations, in particular those of sub-Saharan Africa, in rejecting great pressures from France, and the US and other countries to sell out the ICC, is a remarkable story of political courage.

■ **During the negotiations, India said the use of nuclear weapons should be considered a war crime. What do you think about this?**

W. P.: The list of tantalizing proposals made by India and some other countries was irresistible, and it seemed impossible that nations would reject them. But governments knew that India's goal was not to outlaw nuclear weapons but to wreck the ICC treaty.

The nuclear powers heard the shot across their bows in Rome, and this issue will come up at every review conference of the ICC. But it may be even more important to understand that, as the International Court of Justice stated in 1996 in its advisory opinion on the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, it is nearly impossible for nations to use nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction without committing crimes against humanity as they are defined.

■ **How would you react to the apprehensions of certain countries that excesses by their military forces during peacekeeping missions could also be subjected to prosecution by the ICC?**

W. P.: The overwhelming majority of nations which contribute peacekeeping troops did not share the concerns about this issue expressed by France and the US. First, most of us expressed outrage that any government would argue that peacekeeping troops should be allowed to commit war crimes or crimes against humanity with impunity or else they might not agree to participate in these operations. Second, again, national military tribunals would have primary jurisdiction. Thus, apprehension about the problem of "excesses" is not that serious.

■ **When ICC becomes fully operational, do you think it will become a supranational body and interfere with the Security Council's work?**

W. P.: The danger is that the Security Council will interfere with the ICC, not the other way around. What has been done is to adopt a statute creating a

Rwanda 1994: rows of skulls in N'Tarama church.

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court to enforce violations of the Geneva Conventions on the Laws of War and the Genocide Convention of 1948. One can only say that the new world court will be supranational to the extent that these laws and the ICC statute are universally ratified and are customary international law, and that the ICC's universal jurisdiction is supported by the Security Council. In fact, the ICC complements national jurisdiction so the answer is that it will be a mixture—sometimes international, sometimes, when activated by the Security Council, supranational.

It certainly will not interfere with, but assist the Security Council. One of the controversial provisions allows the Council to delay or suspend a matter before the court for twelve months if the pursuit of international justice and the maintenance of international peace and security come into conflict.

■ **If the Security Council blocks a case against a country or a group for one year and keeps renewing it every year, will this affect the credibility of the ICC?**

W. P.: Yes, but it will undermine the credibility and authority of the Security Council even more. I know it is heresy amongst NGOs for me to say so, but I believe the Singapore-Canada formulation* is one of the most important achievements of the ICC treaty. I believe there may be times when a serious legal and political conflict could arise between the ICC and the Security Council warranting a temporary suspension. I believe that the human rights NGOs greatly underestimate the difficulty in getting all the five permanent members and two-thirds of the elected members of the Security Council to adopt such a resolution, much less renew it.

■ **Any closing thoughts?**

W. P.: We have much work before us. With the achievement of the ICC statute we have demonstrated another example of the extraordinary development of the "new diplomacy" characteristic of the post-Cold-War period which offers the hope of better global governance in the next century. Too much of history is the story of wars won and peace lost. This summer in Rome peace won and war lost. ■

Interview by **Ethirajan Anbarasan**

* Singapore and Canada proposed that the ICC would stay out of situations if the Security Council told it to, for a 12-month renewable period. *Editor*

The struggle goes global

With economic and social rights now on the agenda, many new players have emerged alongside older human rights organizations. In South Korea, women are speaking out about their working conditions, and in Great Britain the homeless and badly-housed are voicing demands

'No one can be perfectly free till all are free.'

Herbert Spencer. United Kingdom.

While the universality of human rights is increasingly challenged, a growing number of activists is formally rejecting any attempt to water down the principle with claims of cultural relativism. The battle for human rights has become universal.

"The United Nations conference in Vienna in June 1993 shed light on a movement that had been gathering momentum since the late 1980s and confirmed the emergence of local players," says Antoine Bernard, executive director of the International Federation of Human Rights, whose membership rose from 66 in 1991 to 105 in 1997.

The gatherings held by non-governmental organizations (NGO) on the fringes of five United Nations conferences between 1992 and 1995 brought to light another major trend: the proliferation of women's movements. They argue that women account for half the world's population and must have the same rights as men. Their priority is fighting the discrimination and violence women endure everywhere in the world. So the community of human rights activists has integrated new, previously marginalized players at the same time that the movement has become global.

In Africa, Latin America, Europe and, most recently, Asia, the collapse or weakening of repressive regimes has been fertile ground for a new crop of human rights organizations. At first they were national human rights groups and local branches of Amnesty International. Today they are more than just offshoots of large organizations based in the countries of the North. An often impressive number of home-grown groups has taken up where international organizations ▶

left off as economic and social changes spawn the need for new forms of solidarity.

Ayo Obe, the Nigerian chairwoman of the Civil Liberties Organisation, says foreign aid and cash helped launch such groups. But today activists, many of them volunteers, are legion. Their primary objectives are to "improve society," to make up for the lack of government action and to fight discrimination, damage to the environment and state-inspired violence. Those goals are shared by most African countries which have seen the most spectacular growth of human rights organizations.

Previously underground and exiled activists laid the groundwork for the proliferation of human rights groups in the late 1980s. "The human rights movement in Latin America was already quite advanced before the dictatorships fell, but it was politically confrontational and centred on large organizations," says Bernard. "Today groups are highly diverse and do a lot of in-depth work, especially to raise awareness of the law."

In the former communist countries, the human rights movement has also grown by leaps and bounds since the Berlin wall fell in 1989. "As soon as the Soviet empire showed the first evident signs of collapse, numerous NGOs sprang up all over the USSR," says Boris Pustintsev, chairman of Citizens Watch.

While the first generation of human rights groups "resisted government's attempts to curb the democratization process," says Pustintsev, the second wave has focused mainly on limiting the damage caused by the ensuing social crisis. In Eastern Europe, as yesterday's dissidents moved into positions of power, civil society was left without its best defenders. Grassroots initiatives did not pick up again until two or three years ago. The still-fragile groups concentrate on burning issues such as the defence of minorities.

The human rights movement still has a long way to go

The battle for human rights came later to Asia, where dictatorships die harder. Asian activists took advantage of the opportunities opened up by the transition to democracy, especially in the Philippines in 1986 and South Korea in 1987. Since then they have stepped up their efforts. They are highly organized, use state-of-the-art communication technology and have formed regional federations. One of their priorities is the dismantling of the "national security" laws which governments use to justify their cruellest acts of violence.

The human rights movement may be global and relatively well-organized, but it still has a long way to go. Every day, activists must cope with a lack of skill and funding as well as with repression that is increasingly multi-faceted. They must also learn how to co-operate with the authorities while maintaining a critical distance from them.

The Russian government may be weak and unreliable, but it has taken several steps in the right direction, says Pustintsev. Independent NGOs must help and advise the government and act as a link to ordinary citizens. "But it's hard to play this new role," Pustintsev says, because the government's old reflex of taking control of any initiative by civil society is still alive and well.

Faced with new problems, human rights activists must move ahead by trial and error. In North Africa they started out by imitating the European model. But today, says Moroccan historian Driss el-Yazami, the movement has "a historically new mission: to limit the clashes between Islamic fundamentalists and the state." He says that members of human rights groups, women's rights activists and journalists who side with the authorities in the fight against religious fundamentalism are missing the chance to establish unquestionable legitimacy in their societies. To achieve that goal, he says, "they must try to play the role of pacifiers and mediators."

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Huairou, September 1995: the forum of non-governmental organizations took place on the fringes of the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing.

The upheavals of the 1990s have affected the countries of the North as well. Older organizations have struggled for a new lease of life while a new, younger and more aggressive form of activism has appeared.

As inequality has increased, "radical activity has moved to the social arena," says Martine Bartélémy, an expert on NGOs at France's National Political Science Foundation. British lawyer Michael Ellman adds that NGOs are becoming highly specialized and increasingly resorting to direct action. He cites organizations defending the rights of women, homosexuals, children and the homeless. "People are no longer taking action because they have some overall project to change society," says Bartélémy, "but because they have a specific goal and want to achieve it immediately."

Non-governmental organizations are highly diverse but moving in the same direction. North and South, economic and social issues are taking precedence. Even human rights groups are campaigning against social exclusion. "Our biggest need is to make the connection between civil and political rights and economic and social rights," says Jaribu Hills, US co-ordinator of the Southern Human Rights Organizers' Network. "We can't fight against police brutality without fighting against extreme poverty and the economic production system," she says.

As they continue their struggle around the world, activists have demonstrated that human rights really are a universal ideal. Now they want to prove that they are indivisible. ■

Sophie Boukhari

'Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.'

George Bernard Shaw. 1856-1950. Ireland.

South Korea: working women demand their due

Working women in South Korea have never enjoyed the same rights as their male counterparts. In the 1960s, when men were struggling for improved working conditions and higher wages, women were busy defending their basic human rights.

South Korea's population of 45 million includes 22 million in the work force, of whom nearly nine million are women. Yet the country's male trade union leaders rarely think of the specific problems of women in the workplace. What's more, men are reluctant to acknowledge the important contribution women make in the struggle to improve working conditions.

Founded in 1992, the Korean Women Workers Association United (KWWAU) is a network of six regional women's organizations. Its main task is to educate and organize women and to develop campaigns and policies designed to improve mother-and-child health care and to ensure equality and stability in labour contracts and on-the-job training.

One of the services offered is the "Equality Line" counselling centre, which advises women on how to deal with occupational problems and unfair treatment. Of all the women who called on this service last year, 56.6 per cent complained of delays in being paid, job insecurity and unwarranted dismissal, while 14.6 per cent reported cases of sexual harassment and violence at the workplace. Some 13.7 per cent said that working conditions failed to take their role as mothers into account. Sexual discrimination accounted for 8.7 per cent of all complaints and work-related ailments amounted to 6.4 per cent.

In addition to these counselling services, Equality Line also organizes conferences and educational programmes. The group has recently published a book containing a list of all the cases it handled from September 1996 to August 1997, with the aim of acquainting other women workers with the most commonly encountered labour problems and ways of dealing with them.

KWWAU is run by a team of six graduate professionals with several years' experience in organizations concerned with the legal rights of female workers. Its activities include investigating work situations where women are unfairly treated, questioning government policies which do not provide for the rights of working women, organizing forums and setting up action plans to promote awareness among regional groups and other associations working to ensure that women have a fair deal on the labour market.

The organization's budget for the current year is some $90,000. The bulk of that amount comes from members' contributions and from assistance provided by other national and international organizations. A small proportion of the funding is provided by grants from government agencies for projects proposed by KWWAU.

The activities of KWWAU are starting to have a perceptible impact. Following several meetings between the group's regional chapters and the country's trade unions, an agreement was reached to build day-care centres near workplaces. In 1993 a collective convention was signed to open day-care centres hospitals, banks and businesses. ■

Jany Lesseur

Striking women in Seoul, January 1997.

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To live with dignity in the United Kingdom

While most people in the United Kingdom enjoy an adequate if not high standard of living, many do not have a decent place to live—or anywhere at all.

Though suffering from mental illness, Gordon (not his real name) is responsible for looking after his three-year old daughter. They lived in a damp, cold, run-down rented room riddled with woodworm. Their lives changed when the local social services agency turned for help to Shelter, a British non-governmental organization that defends the right to housing. The group negotiated with social services to have Gordon allocated a monthly sum and provided father and daughter with a better home.

Shelter estimates that an average of 470 families lose their homes in the United Kingdom every day, finding themselves forced to wander the streets in search of somewhere to live, if only temporarily. In March 1998, at least one million people were living in these appalling conditions.

Chris Holmes, the director of Shelter, the largest non-governmental organization of its kind in the country, said it "exists for people facing these kinds of situations. In our view, everybody in society is entitled to enjoy a proper, decent and safe home." Since 1996, Shelter has been working to help and support anyone living in dreadful conditions or on the streets.

Shelter assists people in distress free of charge through a network of 52 centres spread out over almost the entire country. It also organizes frequent campaigns to pressure the authorities into changing the law and coming up with practical and financially viable solutions. The group's 900 volunteers participate in specific projects, field missions, information processing and administrative work.

The results are plain to see. Holmes says, "through our action in 1997, 100,000 families and individuals were given advice and assistance and, in other cases, were saved from eviction." The different centres provide services ranging from informing people of their rights to accompanying families when they move into their new homes.

The organization has a budget of nearly $17 million. The bulk of the funds comes from individual donations, private companies, schools and religious groups. Shelter also raises money by conducting used clothes drives and runs a network of shops that sells the group's publications and garments bearing its logo.

Homelessness undermines the dignity of the individual, but Shelter points out that it also entails considerable social and financial costs. On the basis of statistical evidence, the organization repeatedly says that the life expectancy of a person living on the streets is 42, compared with the national average of 74 for men and 79 for women.

Every day, 470 families in the United Kingdom become homeless

Mindful that a roof is not the be-all and end-all, Shelter is also interested in people who have homes but live in poor conditions. Carrie, a 10-year-old girl, lives in a cramped studio apartment with her parents and baby sister. Her mother and father purchased the room before Carrie was born. When they wanted to move to something bigger, housing prices had increased so much they could not rent or buy anything else. Carrie suffers from serious asthma and has nowhere to play or do her homework, which is affecting her performance at school. Her mother says, "There is just nowhere to put anything. I am seeing a doctor for stress. I feel constantly stressed out and that all I want to do is murder somebody."

Human tragedies like these inspired Shelter's latest campaign, "Behind Closed Doors", which was launched last March. The goal was to highlight the seriousness of such situations and raise the authorities' awareness, thus encouraging them to treat cases like Carrie's as priorities. Louise Casey, the deputy director of Shelter, says, "a house is not a home if it is dangerous and unhealthy and makes life a misery. Having a roof over your head does not mean you have somewhere decent to live, and it should certainly not disqualify people from getting help." ■

J.L.

For more information, consult the website: http://www.shelter.org.uk

'My political ideal is the democratic ideal. Everyone must be respected as a person, and no one must be deified.'

Albert Einstein, 1879-1955, Germany

Mission accomplished

Jody Williams*

In 1992, six non-governmental organizations launched a campaign to scrap antipersonnel landmines. Five years later, 121 countries have signed the Ottawa treaty to ban them

Even die-hard optimists would not have believed it possible when a handful of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came together in 1992 to take landmines out of the world's arsenals. Because the lowly landmine has been in widespread use by most fighting forces in the world throughout this century, the possibility of banning the weapon looked far from achievable. However, the situation changed dramatically in five years. "The campaign started a process which in the space of a few years changed a ban on antipersonnel mines from a vision to a feasible reality," explained the committee awarding the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

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British anti-landmine posters.

The ICBL made wishful thinking a reality when 121 governments came to Ottawa, Canada in December 1997 to sign the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT). The numbers continue to grow as does the momentum towards a total elimination of landmines. The Nobel Committee concluded that "as a model for similar processes in the future, the campaign could prove of decisive importance to the international effort for disarmament and peace."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, NGOs began to seriously think about trying to deal with a global humanitarian crisis—the tens of millions of landmines claiming hundreds of lives every year all over the world. It became very clear that to eliminate the problem, it would be necessary to eliminate the weapon—to ban the production and use of landmines.

In October 1992, Handicap International, Human Rights Watch, Medico International, Mines Advisory Group, Physicians for Human Rights and Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation formally launched the ICBL with a "joint call to ban antipersonnel landmines." These organizations, which became the steering committee of the ICBL, called for an end to the use, production, trade and stockpiling of mines. The call also pressed governments to increase resources for humanitarian mine clearance and for victim assistance.

The international campaign has become an unprecedented coalition of over 1,000 organizations working together in 60 countries to achieve a ban. And as the campaign grew, the steering committee expanded to represent its diversity. The Afghan and Cambodian campaigns and Radda Barnen were added in 1996; the South African campaign and Kenya Coalition in 1997; and the Association to Aid Refugees, Japan, Lutheran World Federation, the Colombia Campaign Against Landmines, Inter African Union of Human Rights and Norwegian People's Aid joined early this year.

The core strength of the campaign, has always been its loose structure. There has never been a central secretariat or headquarters. There has never been an overreaching, bureaucratic structure. ICBL members always meet regularly to plot out overall strategies and plan joint actions, but beyond that each NGO and each national campaign is free to develop its own work best suited to its mandate, culture and circumstances.

The overall strategy of the international campaign has always been to press for national, regional and international measures to ban landmines. Initially an attempt was made to persuade the nations to review the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which attempted to control the use of antipersonnel mines and to ban the weapon by amending the convention. While the revised CCW did not ban them, pressure by the ICBL made many governments take the issue seriously.

During the last phase of the CCW review, the campaign called on individual governments to come together in a pro-ban group. A series of meetings between pro-ban governments and the ICBL was held in Geneva during the final sessions of the review conference. After the conference in May 1996, the Canadian government offered to host a governmental meeting in October. The hectic negotiations in the subsequent months paved the way for the historic December 1997 meeting in Ottawa for the Mine Ban Treaty.

At the time of writing, twenty-eight states—more than half the number necessary for entry into force—have deposited their instruments of ratification at the United Nations. Six other governments have finalized and just have to deposit the ratification.

The ICBL, and its partnership with governments, has launched a truly remarkable and historic process. It has clearly demonstrated that civil society and governments do not have to see themselves as adversaries. It also shows that small and middle powers can work together with civil society and address humanitarian concerns with breathtaking speed. ■

* Co-ordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize

Keeping up with science

Timothy Caulfield*

"Science, by itself, cannot supply us with an ethic. It can show us how to achieve a given end, and it may show us that some ends cannot be achieved. But among ends that can be achieved our choice must be decided by other than purely scientific considerations."

Bertrand Russell, 1950

Bertrand Russell's caution on the ethic of science is more pertinent today than ever before. But we still seem far from developing an effective human rights framework to guide the choices we, as a world community, make about the use of emerging technologies. The sheer momentum of science, spurred on by the commercial entities funding research, continues to dominate our decisions. Can human rights instruments give us the direction we need? Perhaps not.

The response of legislators to the ongoing "genetic revolution" illustrates the shortcomings of current regulatory approaches. The Human Genome Project, an international effort to sequence and map all the human genes, is probably the most scrutinized scientific endeavour in history. Most of the participating nations have set aside part of their science budgets to address the ethical, legal and social issues involved. Yet this analysis has resulted in only a few formal genetic policies with any real legal teeth.

Domestic law has always struggled to keep pace with the advance of technology. The problems are amplified in the arena of international human rights law with its plurality of cultures, beliefs and values. Only the most basic principles are likely to survive the polarized debates. As exemplified by the UNESCO Declaration on the Protection of the Human Genome, the substance of many of the final documents seems to hinge on the interpretation of amorphous terms like "human dignity".

There are also more specific reasons why it is difficult to create effective human rights "rules" including: the daunting task of writing scientifically meaningful regulations and the fact that the social norms which compel the implementation of safeguards evolve almost as quickly as the technology (consider in vitro fertilization).

The regulatory issues raised by Dolly, the first cloned mammal, highlight these challenges. For example, a number of the pre-Dolly laws prohibiting human cloning, such as Great Britain's, addressed embryo splitting technology. As a result, a rigid application of such provisions would miss the nuclear transfer technique used to create Dolly.

More importantly, Dolly highlights the need for meticulous policy analysis. Unfortunately, an ill-informed polemic seems to drive far too much of the "biopolicy" dialogue. One could argue that both the eugenic laws of the early twentieth century and the recent commentary on human cloning are based on an inaccurate view of genetic determinism. That is an ironic conclusion, since state-imposed eugenic policies obviously offend human dignity while cloning regulations explicitly seek to protect it. Nevertheless, if one scrutinizes the proposals to ban human cloning it is difficult to find a satisfactory critique of this paradox. A worrisome trend given that a deterministic ethos is arguably more threatening to human dignity than an undeveloped cloning technology.

But let us consider a possibly more troubling controversy. Many have argued that the marriage between commerce and human genetics will usher in an era of laissez faire eugenics in which the social definitions of disease, disability and normalcy are dictated by market forces.

How can traditional human rights instruments address such a concern? It may be impossible. First, the commercialization of genetics is part of a growing, multi-billion dollar industry viewed by many governments as a vital part of the economy.

Second, because the notion of autonomy remains a fundamental human right, any policy seen as curtailing the ability to choose will meet resistance. Furthermore, in many Western countries individual freedom is indistinguishable from a perceived right to be an unrestrained consumer. In health care, autonomy has metamorphosed from a right to determine what is done to your body into a right of access. State imposed eugenic policies are relatively easy to condemn, but how do you get at the aggregate effect of consumer decisions?

Finally, the subtle attitudinal changes associated with the genetic revolution are the result of social forces, not state policies. As such they may easily pass unnoticed.

Though I am not a "Luddite," some form of social control is needed. However, many concerns associated with the genetic revolution may be beyond the reach of human rights instruments. The genetech industry will be propelled forward by social forces imbedded in the fabric of Western culture. It seems certain that the cumulative pressure of these forces will prove too much for the most sharply crafted declaration. ■

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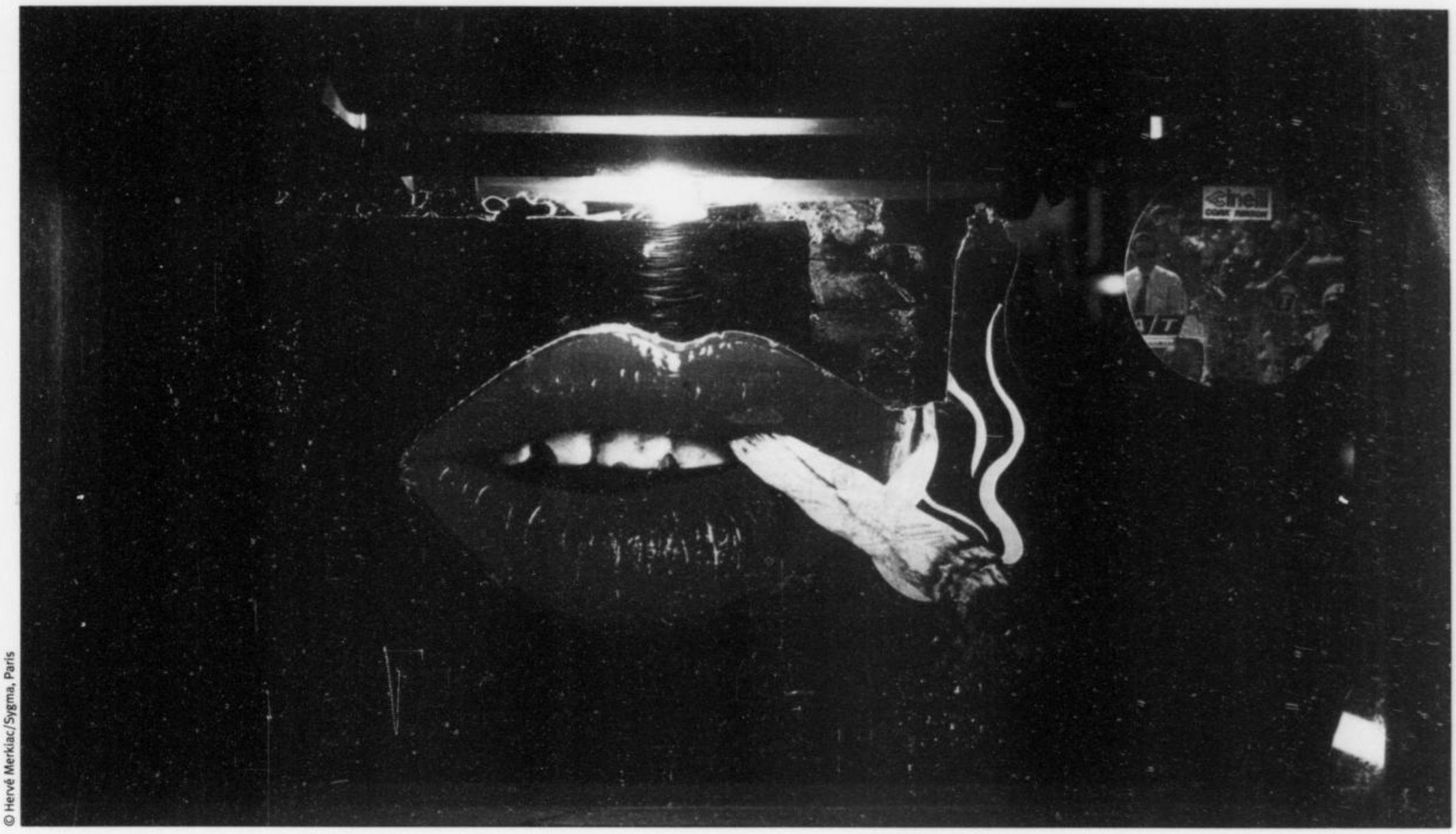
Drugs: surveillance



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Behind the windows of a Dutch coffee shop, smoking hashish is legal.

or punishment?

Philippe Bordes*

Should drugs be tolerated, legalized or prohibited? The debate takes on new proportions with the growing use of illicit substances

The war on drugs is a failure. Declared by the United States in 1983 and taken up by the international community in 1989, the objective was to cut off the consumer countries of the North from the producers of illicit drugs in the South, which are the targets of an increasingly expensive crackdown. The United States alone increased funding for this war from $4.7 billion in 1988 to $12.3 billion in 1993. Yet the participants in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, which took place in New York from 8 to 10 June 1998, came to the conclusion that never before have such vast amounts of illicit substances been on the market at such low prices, which are reliable indicators of overproduction. Repression that focuses exclusively on supply—cultivation, production and trafficking—is a continuation of a Cold War mind-set that viewed the world as divided into "good guys" and "bad guys". The blatant failure of that approach has led to the search for new strategies. Nowadays everyone more or less agrees that drug users are at the heart of the problem, but solutions remain to be found.

The special session in New York was an opportunity for renewed debate between advocates of prohibition and supporters of liberalization. Such discussions among experts are often difficult for the public at large to fathom, especially because of the confusion between the two major concepts involved: decriminalization of drug use and legalization of drugs themselves.

The three United Nations conventions on narcotics, which provide a framework for the international prohibition system, leave room for interpretation. The authors of these accords have always contended that, unlike measures that target drug supply, steps to curb drug consumption—designated by the ▶

* Geopolitical Observatory on Drugs, France

term "use"—fall within the sovereignty of each member state. The 1997 World Drug Report produced by the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) stated that, "None of the Conventions requires a party to convict or punish those who commit such offences [acquiring, possessing or consuming drugs], even when they have been established as punishable; alternative measures may also substitute for criminal prosecution." In line with this, signatory countries to the convention have developed a wide array of responses to drug use. In some countries of the European Union such as France and Luxembourg, for example, personal drug use is against the law, while others, such as Spain, only prosecute drug use in public places and possession with intent to sell. Drug abuse or addiction should increasingly be dealt with not by putting users behind bars but by court-ordered rehabilitation (what might be called a therapeutic injunction) within the framework of treatment programmes. But major differences persist between drug rehabilitation systems. At the same time, law enforcement officials overwhelmed by the scope and increasing sophistication of drug trafficking are often tempted to crack down on casual users in order to achieve tangible results, thus filling prisons without disrupting the illicit trade.

This is the context in which the advocates of decriminalization are increasingly making their voices heard. They recommend legalizing, instead of prosecuting, the possession of small amounts of drugs intended for personal use. The idea is gaining ground in the European Union, but in the rest of the world the trend is towards a harder line on possession and use to try and stem the rising tide of drug addiction, especially in the South where it is a recent phenomenon. Sometimes users are even sentenced to death for the possession of a few grams. Its supporters say that decriminalization is just one part of an overall risk reduction policy. They argue that it would be futile to try to eliminate the use of illegal drugs, which is inherent in our societies, without getting at the roots of such problems of the modern world as loneliness, unemployment and other forms of economic and emotional distress.

Abstinence, which is the aim of prohibition, must therefore not be the main goal but, in the words of Dutch specialist Henk Jan Van Vliet, "the final objective in a hierarchy of objectives." The highest priority is to implement a policy that would help users kick the habit when they decided to, not just when a judge ordered them to. Such an approach, supporters argue, would minimize the marginalization and health hazards stemming from drug taking. The emergence of Aids and the spread of HIV infection among heroin addicts, who inject the drug, is a major argument in favour of this approach. Many governments with repressive policies have been compelled to allow over-the-counter sales of needle kits before setting up drug substitution programmes. Switzerland and the Netherlands are even experimenting with the distribution of heroin itself, as a way of keeping adulterated and dubious products off the market while breaking up the relationship between user and dealer.

Users have even been sentenced to death for the possession of a few grams

Another basic argument in favour of risk reduction is the distinction between soft and hard drugs. The former, primarily the cannabis derivatives hashish and marijuana, are not considered very harmful. The latter, including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines and other synthetic drugs, carry "unacceptable" risks. At present, The Netherlands is the only country with legislation based on that distinction, although a scientific report handed in to France's junior minister of health in June 1998 made headlines by asserting that "cannabis has no neurotoxicity" and "from that point of view, is completely different from alcohol, cocaine, ecstasy and psychostimulants."

The Dutch exception is a model for risk reduction advocates. Contrary to popular belief, the possession of drugs for personal use is against the law in The Netherlands. But the possession and sale of less than 30 grams of cannabis derivatives has been tolerated since 1972. That has given rise to the 200 or so coffee shops where users can legally purchase and consume hashish or marijuana. The last point is exactly where the risk reduction principle encounters the fiercest opposition. The UNDCP stresses that "most of the arguments advanced in the name of risk reduction are compatible with a flexible interpretation of the prohibition policy." But in the case of The Netherlands, the step towards de facto legalization of cannabis seems to have been taken. This is a step the United Nations refuses to recommend.

The legalization of drugs would simply consist of allowing substances that are today illicit to be freely sold. Actually, it would be difficult to find an anti-prohibitionist who would advocate such a radical solution. A more accurate term to describe what they favour would be controlled legalization. In other words, narcotics production and distribution would come under state control along lines that could be compared to the way opium was produced and distributed in the former European colonies. The pro-legalization camp includes figures as varied as lib-

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Soldiers destroying poppy fields in Thailand.

eral economists, legal experts, doctors, psychologists and sociologists. They do not advocate consumption, but contend that adopting their position would help fight crime.

They reason that drugs must be legalized to limit the enormous costs of repression as it is currently carried out; to deprive criminals, prohibition's only beneficiaries, of a substantial source of revenue; and to reduce public health costs by guaranteeing the quality of the products and by raising taxes that would be used to fund drug rehabilitation programmes.

How would the legal sale of drugs be organized?

The advocates of prohibition reply on technical and moral grounds. How would the legal sale of drugs be organized? Who would sell them? Doctors, who would become "dealers in white coats" and prescribe products that have no therapeutic value? To whom would they be sold? If only to adults, then how would we prevent a black market intended for minors from developing? Should cannabis be the only legalized drug? Organized crime networks are so adept at switching from one illicit substance to another, depending on trends and markets, that all drugs would have to be legalized. Lastly, they argue, the organized suicide and poisoning by a state of its citizens would be an admission of powerlessness.

Clearly, the debate over anti-drug policies raises extremely complex questions. And the arguments voiced do not even take account of the narcotics market's global dimension. The extremely inadequate data that fuel the debate only take into account the situation in wealthy countries. But the South cannot be left out. It would be hypocritical to talk about legalizing the consumption of cannabis in Europe while criticizing a producer country for not doing anything to eliminate illicit crops that provide a livelihood for entire populations. And how can we talk about consumption while ignoring the millions of new users who have appeared in developing countries in recent years? Lastly, "risk reduction" cannot be mentioned without tackling the relationship between the explosion of the Aids epidemic in southern Africa and the abuse of alcohol, the West's "legal drug". One thing is clear: the time has come for a widespread debate based on rational studies rather than prejudices and taboos that, in the final analysis, help romanticize drugs and, consequently, boost their power of attraction. ■

Drugs in figures

Production

• **Heroin:** the poppy fields of the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, Thailand) produce annually some 2,500 tons of opium likely to yield 250 tons of heroin. A similar amount is produced in the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan). Poppy cultivation is on the rise in Latin America (100 or so tons of opium annually or 10 tons of heroin) and Central Asia.

• **Cocaine:** according to Interpol, coca plantations in the Andean countries (Peru, Bolivia, Colombia) supply 700 to 1,300 tons of cocaine chlorhydrate a year.

• **Cannabis:** cannabis resin, or hashish, is produced in Morocco (2,000 to 2,500 tons) and Pakistan/Afghanistan (over 2,000 tons). Cannabis herb, or marijuana, is produced worldwide. The World Customs Organization reports the seizure of 513 tons in 1997.

Consumption

There is no truly reliable estimate of worldwide consumption of illicit substances. The United Nations puts forward the figures of eight million heroin addicts, 13.3 million cocaine addicts, 141.2 million users of cannabis derivatives and over 280 million consumers of synthetic drugs (hallucinogens, amphetamines) and various drugs that are used for other than therapeutic purposes (sedatives).

Illicit revenues

The annual global turnover of the illicit drug trade is put at approximately $400 billion, or around 8% of the total value of international trade. Profit margins vary depending on the product. They range from 100% for heroin to 300% for wholesale crack, a form of cocaine that can be smoked. ■

The hard **truth**

Just how far should doctors go in making patients realize that they have only a few months to live? Many physicians avoid the hard truth, fearing that they risk depriving patients of their last chance—the hope and the will—to survive. But they may be doing more harm than good, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*, 3 June 1998).

Studying the cases of 917 adults hospitalized with the final stages of lung or colon cancer, the research found that patients greatly overestimated their chances to live six months, even though their physicians' less optimistic prognoses were far more accurate. While 59 per cent of the patients estimated that they had at least a 90 per cent chance of surviving six months, the data found that only 45 per cent actually lived that long.

This over-optimism heavily influenced patients' treatment decisions. Convinced that they would survive for at least six months, patients tended to opt for aggressive life-prolonging treatment instead of care designed to relieve their pain and discomfort. It is important to note that the more optimistic patients, regardless of their treatment, lived longer than the more pragmatic. However, the patients who sought to extend life had exactly the same median survival as those who privileged their quality of life. In fact, the former were 1.6 times more likely to suffer adverse events like re-admission to the hospital, attempted resuscitation or death while attached to a ventilator.

"We've got to ask: If patients better understood their prognoses, would they choose the same kind of treatment?" said the study's leading author, Dr Jane Weeks of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (Boston, US) in a *JAMA* press release. As the study concludes, "to achieve the goals of making care at the end of life consistent with patient values and minimizing futile therapy, we may need to change what physicians tell patients about their prognoses and be sure that patients hear and understand what their physicians have said." ■

Culturally

In Central Asia, cultural heritage policies have a single objective: to shore up fragile national identities

As the former Soviet republics of Central Asia get down to post-independence nation-building, a major cultural issue has crystallized around their attitudes to their past, which until recently was designed and organized by Moscow. The end of the Soviet system has not taken the politics out of national heritage—far from it. It has actually led to an excess of politicization as new relationships with the past have entrenched old ways of thinking.

In the 1970s, intellectual elites in the Central Asian republics were able to revive a few selected aspects of their respective national heritages. They were trying to do two things: provide historical justification for the political borders established by Stalin and prove the historical need for a deliberate fusion of the region's peoples with their Russian big brother.

Today, this framework is still the basis of the new interpretation of national history on the fringes of the former Soviet Union. The emergence of autonomous political organizations in the late 1980s and the declarations of independence in 1991 simply reinforced the first aim and turned the second upside down. Legitimizing borders is more important than ever, but now as a means of confirming the break with Russia. At the same time, this recent development incorporates a wide range of attitudes which vary according to the specific features of each national heritage and arise from the political situation of five new states with sometimes divergent interests.

The main purpose of places of remembrance is to provide focal points for consensus. But the societies of Central Asia are scarred by internal divisions inherited from a modern history riven with a host of conflicts. So it would seem hard to promote a sense of unity by referring to political figures of the recent past.

Places of remembrance provide focal points for consensus

For this reason, earlier history has been brought into play, and those grey areas of memory where the unwritten history of the more recent past is stored have been pushed aside. The wealth of recent history was, however, displayed in the Tashkent region of Uzbekistan in 1996 during moving popular celebrations held to mark the twentieth anniversary of the death of Ali Khan Tura Saghuni, who led a resistance movement against the Red Army in the 1920s and then twenty years later headed a short-lived Muslim republic in eastern Turkestan.

Great figures from medieval history serve to recall the independent past of each former Soviet republic, especially in relation to Russia, and its capacity to have its own healthy political institutions. Uzbekistan, for example, which has gone far along the road to de-Russification, has rehabilitated Amir Timur (the Tamerlaine of medieval European chroniclers), who is presented not so much as a conqueror as an epitome of the just ruler, intent on maintaining social harmony.

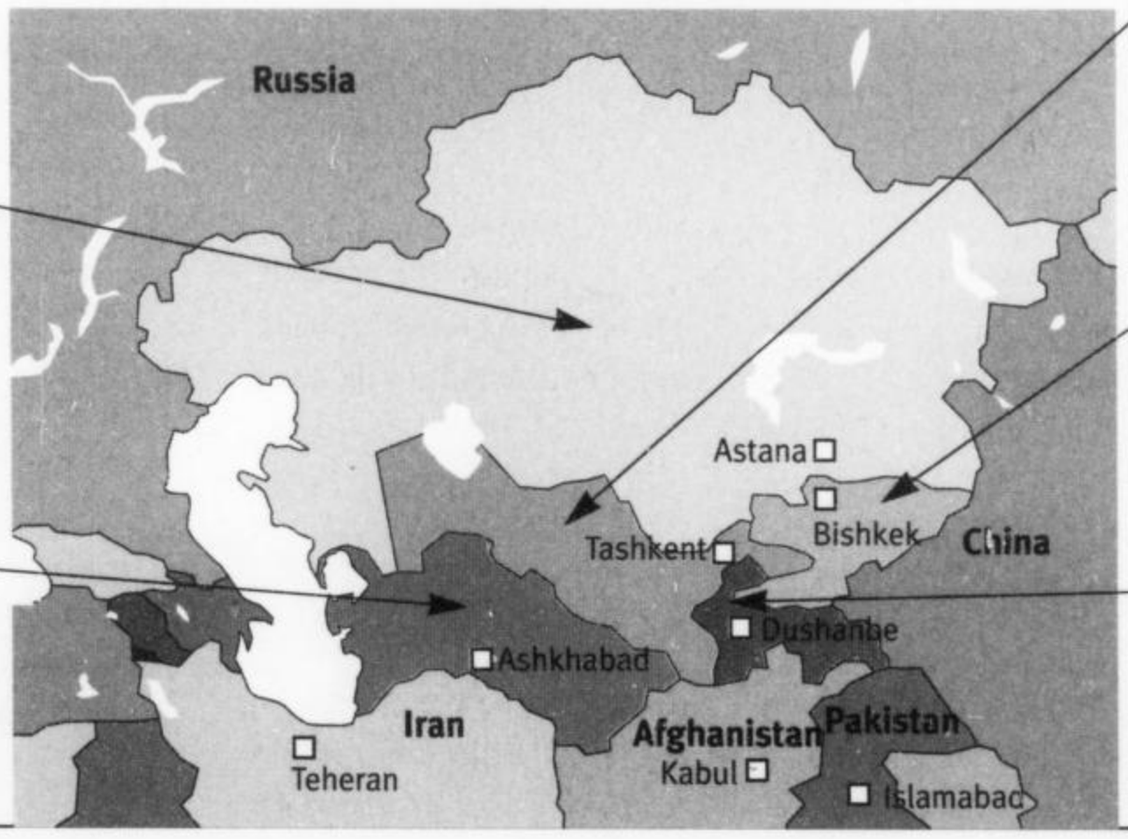
Moves of this kind are sometimes frowned upon by neighbouring states, which do not always have fond memories of the "iron conqueror". Some even see Uzbekistan's action as a bid for hegemony. One such case is Tajikistan, which was invented from scratch in the late 1920s and is a largely Persian-speaking country whose national history is based on glorifying resistance to the inexorable spread of Turkish influence in Central Asia.

Cultural history is not immune to politicization. From the time of de-Stalinization in the late 1950s, commemoration of great

Facts and figures

Kazakhstan
Capital: Astana
Surface area (km²): 2,717,300
Population (millions): 16.8
Per capita GDP (dollars): 3,010
Languages: Kazakh (state language), Russian (official language), German, Ukrainian, Korean

Turkmenistan
Capital: Ashkhabad
Surface area (km²): 488,100
Population (millions): 4.2
Per capita GDP (dollars): 3,469
Languages: Turkmen, Russian



Uzbekistan
Capital: Tashkent
Surface area (km²): 447,000
Population (millions): 23.2
Per capita GDP (dollars): 2,370
Languages: Uzbek, Russian, Tajik

Kyrgyzstan
Capital: Bishkek
Surface area (km²): 198,500
Population (millions): 4.5
Per capita GDP (dollars): 1,800
Languages: Kyrgyz, Russian

Tajikistan
Capital: Dushanbe
Surface area (km²): 143,100
Population (millions): 5.9
Per capita GDP (dollars): 920
Languages: Tajik, Russian

Source: *L'Etat du monde*, 1998

correct

Stéphane A. Dudoignon*

© Ian Berry/Magnum, Paris

A giant portrait of Tamerlaine in Taskhent.

national figures of the past began to revive all along the southern edge of the Soviet Union. This pointed up the uniqueness of each national culture, while at the same time stressing the need to be united with the Russian world. Because these great figures had to be apolitical and non-religious, they were sought in literary history and oral tradition.

The Middle Ages again came in very handy for this, but the modern period could also be re-injected into official histories through the use of "civilizing" figures (known as *prosvetiteli* in Russian) drawn from eighteenth-century Russian cultural history and from the years of Russian populism between 1860 and 1870. In this way, the reform movements which emerged in Central Asia until the area was sovietized in the 1920s, could be presented as the triumph of enlightenment inspired by the Russian example.

For example, after the death of Stalin, the Kazakhs revived the mid-nineteenth-century Kazakh writer Shokan Valikhanov, republishing parts of his work which made him look like a pro-Russian intellectual. In the 1970s, there was much talk of the "civilizer" Ibrahim Altinsarin, a scholar of Kazakh and Cyrillic script. Since independence, the Kazakhs have lionized to an even greater extent the intellectuals who between 1917 and 1919 led the *Alash Orda* government of prominent figures from the steppes with ciose ties to Russian anti-Bolshevik circles.

Persistently forgotten, however, is the party known as the "Three Hundreds" (*Uch Juz*) which, in the same period, spoke for the rising middle class and the radical intelligentsia of the towns of the southern steppes. This piece of history is embarrassing, since *Uch Juz* practised a kind of political Islam and also allied itself with the Bolsheviks.

Another problem was that the radical Kazakhs in *Uch Juz* advocated cross-border solidarity between Muslim peoples. Today however it is unthinkable to question the borders traced in the 1920s and 1930s. This also explains the deliberate neglect of a figure like President Ali Khan Tura Saghuni—born in Tokmak, in present-day Kyrgyzstan, active in Uzbek Ferghana and in Xinjiang, and then exiled to Tashkent—who still has followers almost everywhere in Central Asia.

The new authorities are making their mark, especially in the towns

The desire by the new Central Asian states to make the bounds of their history, over a shorter or longer period, coincide with a geopolitical area inherited from the Stalinist period gives rise to certain conceptual distortions. These are particularly apparent in the way in which the new authorities are making their mark on their country's physical appearance, especially in ►

* University of Tokyo, Japan

the towns. Ancient monuments are being restored and history textbooks rewritten at a feverish pace. The latest major operations of this type were carried out with great pomp at Khiva and at Bukhara, the 2,500th anniversary of whose foundation was celebrated by Uzbekistan in 1997.

All this shows the authorities' concern for the distant past. Government ministries in charge of heritage give priority to the royal architecture of the founding dynasties, especially the Timurids or their immediate successors, even if this means neglecting things which seem less prestigious, or belong to the more recent past and are therefore more problematic. This seems to be the case in Kazakhstan with the restoration of the mausoleum of the eleventh-century Shaykh Ahmad Yasavi, which was undertaken jointly with Turkey in 1992 and is typical of the pan-Turkish rapprochement which followed independence.

Ordinary citizens remember in detail the recent and often painful past

The tombs of national saints, which are often symbols of unity, are being restored with plenty of fanfare and may also reflect a regional stratification of authority. In Tajikistan, the restoration of the mausoleum of Shaykh Muslih ad-Din, in Khoujand, was carried out during perestroika, while the Khoujandis still controlled the Tajik communist party. Then the tomb of Shaykh Yusuf Hamadani in Kulab was restored, after the victory of the Kulabi militias in 1992.

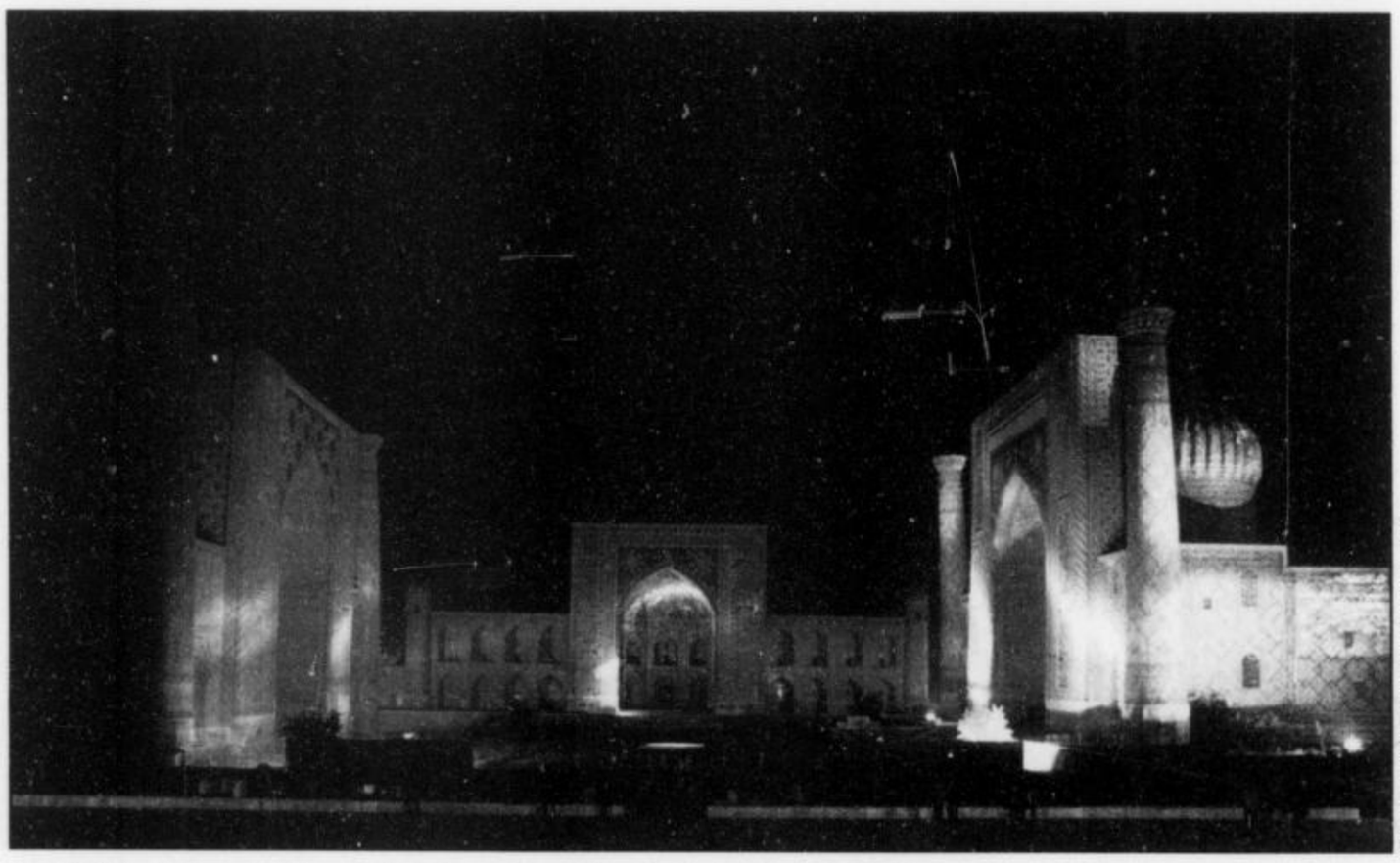
Such operations also clearly have religious overtones. They show a government's desire to keep an eye on the activities of the secret brotherhoods, a valued rampart against the growth of Wahhabism, a strictly conservative Muslim movement that has recently arrived in the region from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

The new Central Asian states are thus taking over a pre-Soviet tradition of using for political ends a despiritualized form of Sufi brotherhood called "ichanism," which is traditionally opposed to fundamentalist movements. One example of this is the Uzbek authorities' current interest in the tomb of the great mystic Baha ad-Din Naqshband, in Bukhara, and the government's tolerance of the posthumous cult which has grown up around Ali Khan Tura, who until his death in 1976 even had many followers inside the Uzbek communist party.

So the politicization of the cultural heritage is a crucial element in nation-building, including the delicate question of borders. A case in point is the more or less symbolic claims of the Tajik intelligentsia to Tajik sovereignty over the holy cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, which have been part of Uzbekistan since the Soviet authorities' first ethno-territorial carve-up of Central Asia in 1924.

But the rediscovery of this heritage is happening at several levels of awareness, which are not always linked to each other by a simple desire for logical coherence.

The official level, with its cult of great figures and monuments standing out against the background of a distant past, is superimposed on a semi-official level consisting of ideological experiments by intellectuals. These two levels seem to have little effect on the counter-culture or at least on the informal approach developed by people at the grassroots. Ordinary citizens remember in detail the recent and often painful past and seem much less confused about things than the ideological hesitations of the new authorities might suggest. ■



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The Tajik intelligentsia has laid claim to Samarkand, a holy city of Uzbekistan.

Tower of discord

Work began this summer on a new scheme to reduce the inclination of Italy's leaning tower of Pisa, probably the world's only architectural masterpiece famed for a construction defect. The 8-storey, 56-metre high white marble tower, which was built between 1173 and 1350, began to lean when its foundations shifted during construction of the third storey, but the builders pressed on regardless. Its overhang was used by Galileo, who dropped metal balls from the top storey to prove the theory of gravity. The tower, which today leans about 5 metres out of true, was closed to tourists in 1990 because of fears that it might topple.

Remedies for the tower's plight have been proposed for centuries. Some of them come from the wilder reaches of the imagination. One proposal advocated attaching a helium balloon to the top of the tower; another favoured reshaping the surrounding meadow so that it would slope in the same direction as the tower leans and make it look upright.

The latest project seeks to raise the tower by half a degree or 40 cm. Soil will be extracted from beneath the high, northern side of the foundations, thereby, says Professor John Burland, a member of the Pisa Commission which is in charge of restoration, "reducing the inclination in a gentle and controlled manner by an amount that is imperceptible to the eye." Temporary steel cables are being used to hold the tower "in the very unlikely event of unforeseen detrimental movements."

Like other schemes before it, the current engineering operation has aroused vociferous criticism, causing the monument to be dubbed the "Tower of Discord" in the Italian press. An organization called Art-Watch International, which monitors art restoration projects, says that repair work has made the structure more unstable than before. Professor Piero Pierotti, a Pisan art historian who has published a book entitled *Una Torre Da Non Salvare* ("How not to save the Tower of Pisa"), was quoted as saying that this work of "soaring imagination and symbolic beauty" is also "unquestionably a phallic symbol" and that "perhaps the attempt to pull it erect is another aspect of the age of Viagra." ■

Today's **headlines**, tomorrow's **world**

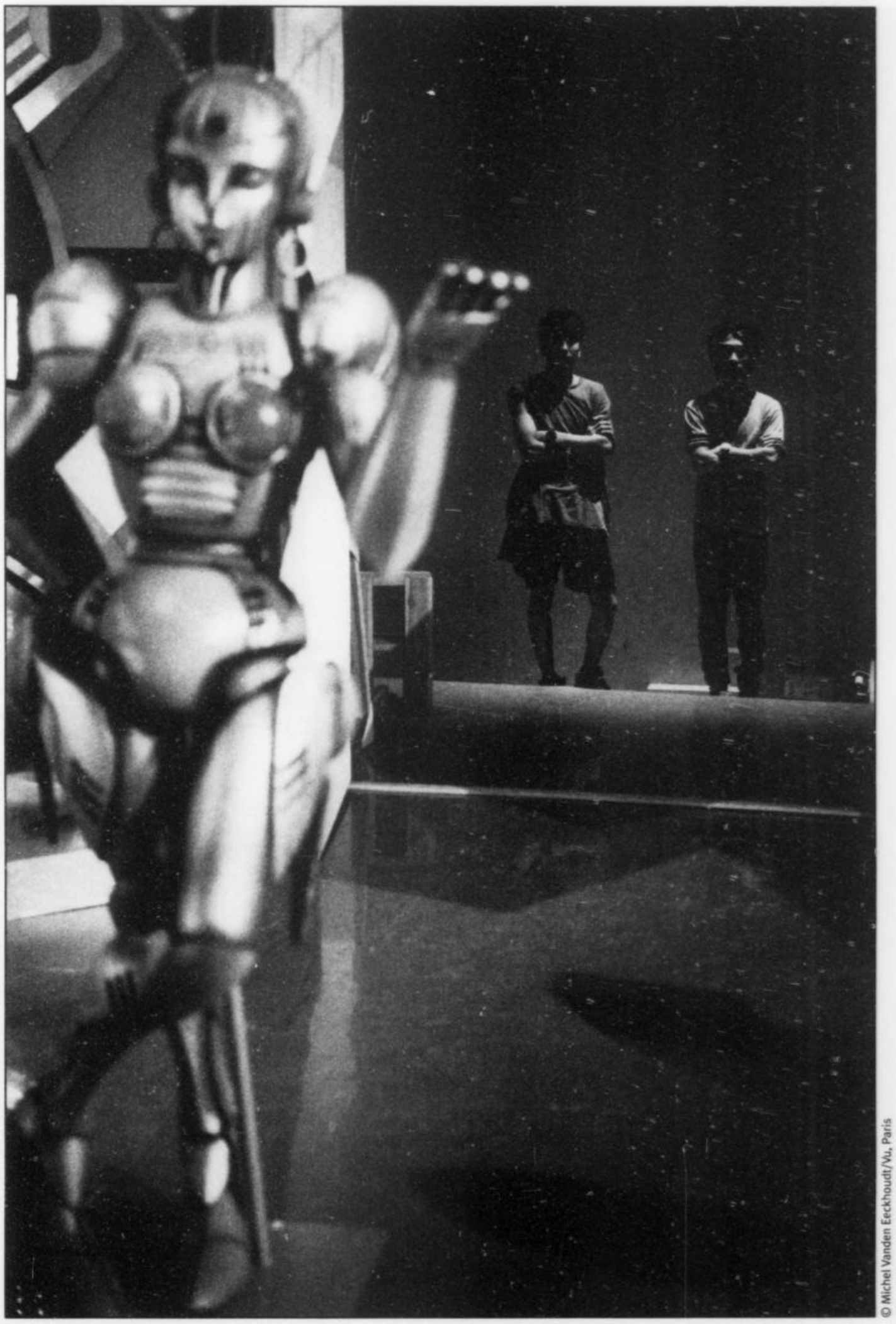
The media's simplistic vision of the next century alternates between gloom and euphoria

We have been spinning fantasies about the third millennium for a long time. But the closer we get to the year 2000, the more harmless it seems, the more artificial the break with the past.

The future is already here, for the media have been swamping us with pictures and stories about what may lie in store. The Italian communications group Mediaset commissioned the Explorer-Ipsos research and marketing institute to conduct a study of how they view the years to come. Entitled "The Media and the Millennium", it was carried out in seven countries regarded as the leading trend-setters—Germany, Spain, the United States, France, Japan, Italy and the United Kingdom—where the media are powerful enough to influence a global public. "We tried to understand how the next millennium was being depicted in the press, on television, on the Internet and in fashion, design, advertising and art," says Giulia Ceriani, who is in charge of semiotic studies at Explorer and presented the survey's main findings at Candido Mendes University in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) last May.

If the media are to be believed, life in the twenty-first century will be no bed of roses. They are predicting "chaos", says Ceriani, citing as evidence cartoons and television series showing the end of the real world and invasion by alien rulers, the increasing number of Internet chat forums on the end of history and art and fashion trends reflecting ideas of change and hybridization. That bleak picture is symptomatic of a total loss of bearings in "a world of contradictions and 'contamination'" characterized by the disappearance of boundaries between objects, identities and values that have long been clearly distinct, such as masculine and feminine, the self and the other, the natural and the artificial.

Fear of the future is fueled in large part by lightning-fast, uncontrolled developments in science and technology such as genetic manipulations that make it possible to "free" an individual's identity from his or her genome, the high-speed circulation of information which shakes cultural certainties, and artificial intelligence which seems to abolish the boundary between humans and machines. "The print and broadcast media echo rising anxiety about the impact of scientific advances, which have much less support and raise many more questions than they did fifteen or twenty years ago," says Suzanne de Cheveigné, a media expert at France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). ▸



© Michel Vanden Eeckhoudt/Vu, Paris

A touch of science fiction in a Japanese television studio.

When they are not preaching doom and gloom, the media, especially television, offer an almost idyllic vision of the future as an era of tremendous advances for humankind, including gene therapy, the emergence of a global citizenry through Internet and the development of clean energy sources. The media's discourse "oscillates between a 'euphoric' and a 'dysphoric' view," says Brian Trench of the University of Dublin, adding that articles and television programmes on science are often "superficial". Pierre Chevalier, of the French-German public television network La Sept/Arte, acknowledges that journalists have a poor command of the "very specific language" required by science reporting, which is difficult to illustrate with pictures. Moreover, most television executives are more interested in high audience shares than programme quality. And to capture the attention of a large number of viewers, shock is often more effective than rational inquiry. "By and large, the bigger and less educated the audience, the gloomier the message," says de Cheveigné.

Media coverage of science also varies depending on the cultural context. Americans have a mostly upbeat, "pragmatic" vision of technological advances and cloning, whereas ethical concerns come to the fore in Europe's Latin countries. American media "present only 'facts' and less speculation about what the implications of the facts might be," says Bruce V. Lewenstein of Cornell University. Trench stresses another facet of the problem. He says the media's rosy outlook on new information technology, for example, reflects a desire to treat computer companies, which are major advertisers, with kid gloves. "The media increasingly belong to corporate interests," says New York broadcast specialist Charles B. Potter, adding that the image they provide of the future has no inherent value but is merely one more "product" on the market.

Still, polls conducted by Explorer-Ipsos reveal that the public has had its fill of simplistic discourse. They would like to see more subtle, hopeful messages about the possibility of taking back control of their destiny. "People are aware they are living through a period of transition and want order," says Ceriani. "They want more rational, less sensationalist communication. They are fed up with the bizarre and the alien. Hence the return in design to simpler, reassuring shapes associated with technology that's under control." The media would do well to fall into step with the trend towards reassurance and a shift in focus back to everyday life. By continuing to stress the inability to find a way out of the crisis, they probably help to increase the public's anxiety and the appeal of New Age movements, forms of immanent spirituality considered capable of exorcising the demons of uncertainty. ■

Sophie Boukhari

When the

Microchips may soon be in your shoes, monitoring your body temperature. But how long before they take you for a walk?

"Look, you're a doughnut." Professor Michael Hawley is stating his case for embedded technology. "You're a roundish little thing with a hole in the top and you pour food in and it comes out a hole in the bottom and you roll around a little during the day, but topologically speaking you're just a doughnut. And that's about all you know about the nature of what you eat and what comes out."

Hawley, a principal investigator for the Things That Think (TTT) consortium, a research group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, is trying to make commonplace, everyday objects smarter to better understand and monitor our bodies. "We are incredibly naive about how our bodies work day to day... because we don't have any way to measure it or sense it."

For too long we have been forced to adapt to technology—to make our bodies and lives conform to clunky desktop computers, for example. We memorize long strings of web addresses to find cheap airfares but have trouble remembering where we left our keys.

The solution to these problems, at least in the United States, is more technology. Embedded technology that is smaller, smarter and, most importantly, everywhere.

Embedded technology—fitting out objects with computational enhancements that integrate digital and physical worlds—will move in two directions: out into our environment and closer to our bodies. According to Professor Mitchel Resnick, another TTT member, the growth of research in this field, which has substantial corporate support, can be tied to three developments: smaller and cheaper processors, better sensors, and continued advances in communication and networking technologies.

Hawley says, "It's becoming miniaturized so quickly that what used to be as big as a house and then as big as a file cabinet now sits on your desk, and then it's in your lap, then it's in your pockets and then it might as well be your pockets."

Back to the doughnut. One of Hawley's many research interests is body monitoring technology. His team has attached new body sensing technology to marathon runners and Mount Everest climbers. Subjects even swallowed a pill that measured body core temperature. Hawley foresees a time when we will monitor our health with a wristwatch

Website of the month

http://www.un.org/dept/dpko

The United Nations system's website, with its broad coverage of every UN issue, continuous updating, important databases and thousands of documents, reports and publications, is a tremendous tool. And it's all free.

It's a one-stop information clearing-house where you can explore every aspect of the UN's work—peace and security, international law, humanitarian affairs, human rights, economic and social development. The homepage links up to a host of other UN sites. If you're too busy to browse, there's a useful search engine to help you find your way through the maze of information.

Among the most useful headings are *UN News* for breaking events, *UN Documents* for major reports and resolutions, *Databases* for statistical data and *CyberSchoolBus* for games, activities and teaching aids for those who want to learn more about global issues. For more scholarly research, the *Dag Hammarksjöld Library* provides access to services, collections, publications and reference guides. The *UN/NGO Link* is indispensable for anyone wanting to find out how the UN works with such humanitarian agencies as the Red Cross and any number of non-governmental organizations. And there's plenty more. ■

kitchen does **the cooking**

device or a processor in the heels of our shoes, where there is room for chips. According to Hawley, health monitoring, for those who can afford it, will be "one of those really big inventions that is an indispensable part of everyday life. So that your shoes know more about you every day than the doctor has ever known before."

Making this technology more intuitive and comfortable is MIT graduate student Margaret Orth, who is developing electronic fabric. While she can imagine the practical uses of fabrics embedded with computational components, Orth is driven by expressive and emotional goals: to create clothing which can not only monitor heart rates but also emotions—or act as an interface for creative expression. She has already designed a musical jacket with a sewn-in keyboard, and believes that "by creating computational devices that are intimate with us physically, we begin to think about technology differently. We begin to think that it is accessible, reachable, creative and ultimately human."

The key to many embedded technologies is the communication between objects. Media Lab researchers have proposed giving every single object on the planet a unique Universal Binary Identification Code (UBIC), a series of numbers that identifies it to any other object or network that has a need to know.

Imagine a smart box of corn flakes. A sensor collects data about how much cereal is in the box. The processor "knows" when the box is almost empty and then communicates the information to the house network, which places an online order for a new box. Hold up a bottle of aspirin to your networked bathroom screen and the manufacturer's web site or information about drug interactions will appear. The goal is to make mundane tasks as easy and automatic as possible, freeing time for more entertaining or thoughtful pursuits.

Place a can of mushroom soup, an old bag of carrots and other food on your kitchen counter and the kitchen will suggest several recipes, then recite the instructions as you cook.

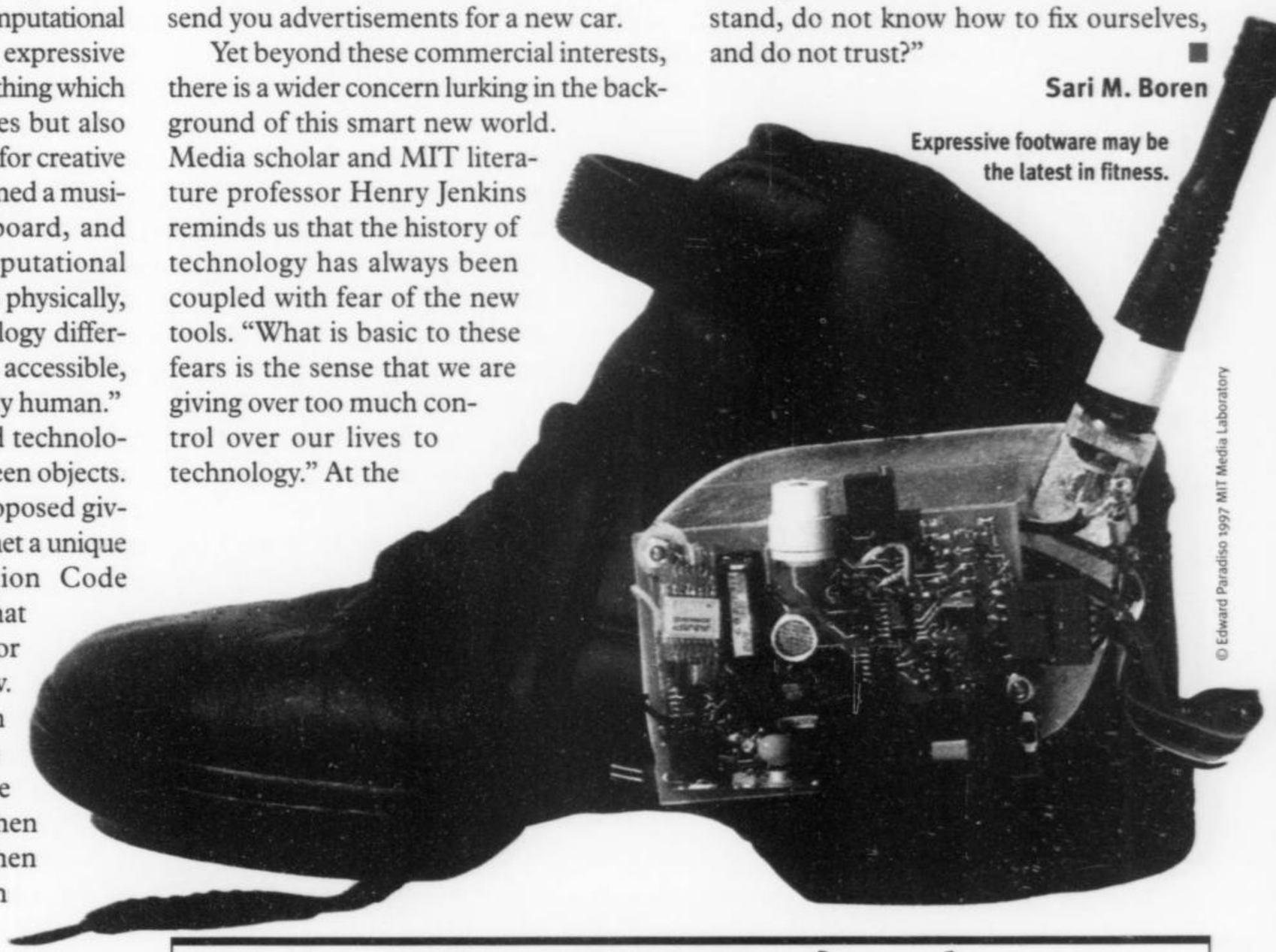
But if your house is automatically reordering everything from your food to your lipstick, how easily could stores or manufacturers construct a profile of your life? Will your home screens display advertisements to offset their cost, and will they make shopping so easy that you purchase more than you need?

As with many new technologies, we will need to balance the issues of access and privacy. Your car company may remind you when you need a tune-up, but by tracking your mileage they will also know when to send you advertisements for a new car.

Yet beyond these commercial interests, there is a wider concern lurking in the background of this smart new world. Media scholar and MIT literature professor Henry Jenkins reminds us that the history of technology has always been coupled with fear of the new tools. "What is basic to these fears is the sense that we are giving over too much control over our lives to technology." At the same time, "We have too long a history of watching technology fail in our daily lives."

As Jenkins explains, "Trusting the machine means not simply trusting the technology itself, which seems alien and unreliable, but also trusting the companies which made it, which are often perceived as out for quick profit, planning for obsolescence, disinterested in consumers' real needs and sloppy in their workmanship. What if we make our culture more and more dependent upon machines which we do not understand, do not know how to fix ourselves, and do not trust?" ■

Sari M. Boren



Expressive footware may be the latest in fitness.

© Edward Paradiso 1997 MIT Media Laboratory

A **smart** deal

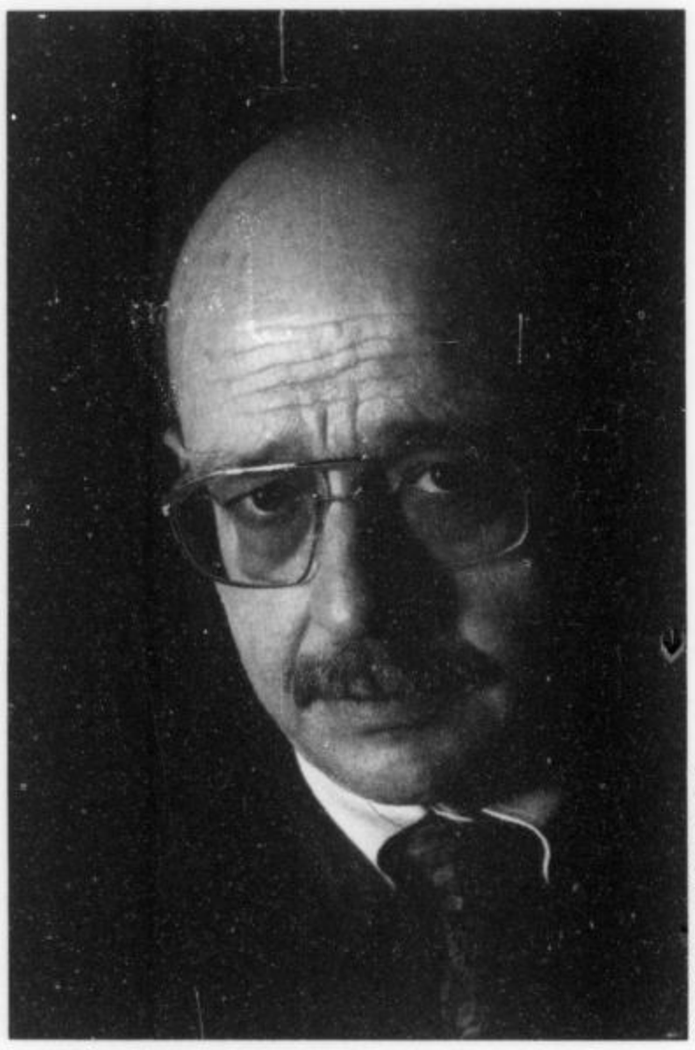
Things That Think (TTT) is one of four research consortia at MIT's Media Lab, which has a total annual budget of about $25 million dollars shared by researchers and the administration. About 45 corporate sponsors pay TTT $125,000 to $200,000 a year in dues in exchange for non-exclusive license rights to intellectual property developed by the group. Beyond the expected participants from the computer industry, TTT's sponsors include a diverse mix of companies such as Visa, Federal Express, Karstadt (a German retailer), Mattel, Lego, Gillette, Volvo, Disney, Nike and Levi's.

Although sponsors cannot dictate or initiate research areas, they are considered collaborators in the Lab's "intellectually open environment".

For more information: www.media.mit.edu. ■

Manuel Vázquez "Writing is an

With a dose of humour, the successful Catalan author discusses such serious topics as society, politics, his craft—and why he writes detective novels



© Sophie Bassouls/Sygma, Paris

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán

■ **Did you know there are over 200 entries for Manuel Vázquez Montalbán on the search engines of the Internet?**

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: I only knew of two pages on the Internet. One of them made me out to be an Italian and the other an American of Galician extraction called Colmeiro. I know both pages exist, but I haven't looked any further into them. I had the Internet installed not long ago and I'm not yet an expert browser, far from it.

■ **Why is it that a man like you, who writes poetry, essays and opinion columns and has always kept up with international events with so critical an eye, should suddenly start writing detective novels?**

M. V. M.: The fact is that the whole of literature, absolutely all of it, is divided into detective novels and romantic novels. Quote me any title from any of the world's literature and you will find that the subject matter either deals with an investigation into the violation of a taboo, in short a crime, or else is a love story.

Detective novels, as originally invented, with a fixed imaginative world, are a very run-of-the-mill and predictable genre. However, the modern detective novel of the past thirty or forty years shouldn't be properly described as such. They're novels like any others in which, basically, an investigation is conducted into the meaning of a social crime. As for how the subject is handled, in my opinion there's no difference compared with a novel that's not in the "detective" category. I regard John Le Carré and Graham Greene as being as ambitious in their literary aims as Virginia Woolf. I know that sounds heretical but I firmly believe it. What interests me is that it's possible to start out from a set character and turn the story almost into a saga about the evolution of a society.

■ **How do you explain the success of Carvalho, the private detective who is the main character in your novels?**

M. V. M.: I think he's an international success for one reason: he's been a mirror not only of the transition that's taken place in Spain but transition in a broader sense. He's a man who recreates the atmosphere of the 1960s, a time which held out great hopes of ecological change and saw the arrival of hippies, the birth control pill, freedom in every form and gentle, lyrical revolutions. There's also a kind of *fin-de-siècle* despair, in which people are scared of losing their jobs and catching Aids and afraid of freedom, a fear that the Pope in Rome and the manipulators of labour markets, among others, have succeeded in instilling in them through a sort of repressive mechanism. Carvalho has mirrored all these things in the novels and that's why I think that what he has to say can be heard in so many places.

■ **Why does cooking occupy so important a place in your books, to the extent that it is almost like a character?**

M. V. M.: In the first place, it's because the only thing I can do, apart from write, is cook. Second, because it is a necessary ingredient, especially in the Carvalho series; cooking is hardly ever mentioned in my other novels. A set character has to have two or three recognizable quirks. There isn't a single character who doesn't have them. Everybody who reads Georges Simenon's Maigret novels knows he's waiting for the first seasonal dishes, the first spring peas in the *brasserie*, no matter how they're prepared, and draught beer the way they only serve it in a particular bar. Readers wait for that to happen; they wait for Sherlock Holmes to play the violin or start sniffing. I gave Carvalho one or two of those traits and I've had to respect them from one novel to the next.

I believe, moreover, that cooking is also a metaphor for one's own culture. I've sometimes stressed this. Cooking is the death mask. In order to eat we have to kill, whether it be a head of lettuce or an animal. If the act is a direct one, in other words if you kill and then eat, it is an act of barbarism. On the other hand, if you kill, cook and then eat, the cultural aspect appears; this involves applying to the act of killing a skill or technology that adds dignity and turns it into culture.

■ **What about book-burning, your hero's other quirk?**

M. V. M.: On several occasions Carvalho says he burns books because literature has not taught him how to live. That's a meaningless exaggeration, but it's a ritual the character has to perform.

Montalbán: act of free choice"

■ **In literary terms, is Carvalho ever going to die?**

M. V. M.: This poses a serious credibility problem for me. Carvalho is a man I originally shut myself up with and I reckoned on giving him more or less a certain age, but I kept on forgetting. However, the character's psychological development corresponds to his physical development, and that makes it very hard for Carvalho to survive as a private detective because aggressiveness, physical strength and a whole gamut of facial expressions are involved, and frankly he cannot afford such luxuries. So in the millennium novel, which I hope will come out in the year 2000, either I can pension him off and get rid of him after he's returned to the world with Biscuter (a former convict who is the detective's assistant), or I can turn him into something else.

I once thought of turning Carvalho into a spy, what might be called a post-modern spy working for new powers that never had any spies before, like autonomous regional authorities, or a municipal, environmental, industrial or ethnic spy. That sort of thing is going to be big business in the future. In the present-day division of conflicts in the world, as essayists like Alvin Toffler and Hans Magnus Enzensberger have actually predicted, information services will be needed in the new climate of conflict that is liable to trigger future civil wars. So why not turn Carvalho into a spy for the Generalitat, the provincial government of Catalonia, with all the overtones of irony and symbolism of setting that could imply? I'm thinking about it as a possibility, but I don't know yet whether I shall go ahead or not.

■ **How do you go about creating your books?**

M. V. M.: I use a very conventional system in which I accumulate facts and ideas. The poet T.S. Eliot describes this creative process very clearly. One stage consists of gathering the materials, whether consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes you accumulate things you initially don't think will end up as a book, a novel or a poem. Even so, you keep on building them up as a reserve, a sort of storehouse. When these materials are dense enough, they look for a way out. It's rather like the moraine of a glacier which goes on piling up debris until the time comes for it to seek an outlet, when a current emerges. That's how I see the creative process.

■ **In your writing, how do you manage to identify with places like Argentina or Bangkok so closely it's as though you had lived there?**

M. V. M.: First, there's the information-gathering process I just mentioned. Then there's the fact that people's ideological and emotional patterns are coming increasingly to resemble each other because we consume the same food and the same cultural and media products. Our living patterns and production relations are becoming more and more alike. That means we can understand much more about how we ourselves behave and how other people behave.

Aristotle is supposed to have said "you are what you eat." It's a fact that, in cultural terms, all of us eat virtually the same things. The closest we can come to living in a Barcelona suburb and watching television is living in a Bangkok suburb and watching television, because all of us watch the same American programmes in any case.

■ **Is that why Barcelona is almost like another character in most of your novels?**

M. V. M.: Yes. Barcelona is a port and a city of transit. It's also a place where many memories exist side-by-side. All that makes it a multi-faceted city in every sense. Such cities tend to be very interesting from the literary point of view. Many cities have literary associations and others do not. A considerable amount of writing has been devoted to Barcelona, as it has to Buenos Aires and many other cities. In the United States, for example, a whole imaginary world has been created by books and films on San Francisco and New York, yet that hardly exists in the case of Washington.

■ **What does Barcelona mean to you personally?**

M. V. M.: It's my homeland, in the true sense of the word. It is the place where you were born, where your reflexes were shaped, where you learnt that other people exist and how much they are threatening or well-disposed towards you. It's the place where you learnt codes of conduct—all kinds, not only having to do with language—and where you also learnt to pick up a system of signals that make you feel you belong to that particular parcel of territory more than to any other.

As you rationalize all this, you come to agree with Saint-Exupéry that you're from the country of your childhood, since childhood is a piece of physical and emotional territory. That's what Barcelona means to me.

More specifically, I'd say I'm not so much from Barcelona as from a particular neighbourhood of the city. That's what marks you in the first place, although then you try to generalize and absorb other cultural features and patterns. That's what Barcelona basically represents for me. Moreover, because of its layout and history, it's not just one conventional city but a diversity of cities because it's an amalgam of different archaeological periods. They're not only monumental, such as the Romanesque city, the Gothic city, the neo-classical city, the city of *modernismo* and of Gaudí, but represent different periods of archaeology as they relate to human beings. Barcelona is a city that attracted various migratory movements which gave rise to the incorporation of new strands and to a degree of cross-fertilization following the clash with the culture that came before.

Moreover, Barcelona was largely shaped at the end of the last century by the influx of Catalans from the countryside, working-class people who flocked there to join the industrial revolution. Hence, it was a gathering-place for people from the grassroots all over the country.

■ **You've always had a sense of political commitment. Do you think writers are bound to be militants?**

M. V. M.: Absolutely. Writing is an act of free choice. Some writers need to get involved in social and political issues and others do not. All we ask of a writer is that he or she should ▶

write well. I subscribe to the theory, which is in fact quite widespread, that there is always something ideological in what all writers have to offer, although they may seem to be completely impervious to that sort of thing. They can always be read in terms of ideology, of taking a stand in the eyes of the world and in our own eyes. Yet we must respect the free choice writers make, the fact that they want to feel they're in touch with real-life causes and with their inner selves.

■ **You recently went to Cuba and reported on the visit of Pope John Paul II. Was that your decision or the idea of the editors of *El País*, the newspaper you write for?**

M. V. M.: I went to Cuba to collect material for my next book and when the newspaper found out I was going there they asked me to write some articles. Everything you see before you comes from Cuba—all the folders, the documents, the books—everything on the tables has to do with Cuba, because I'm in full creative gear. That's why it looks like a battlefield.

■ **What was the significance of that visit, as you see it?**

M. V. M.: I feel that the Pope's visit to Cuba was fundamental, because it's astonishing that, at the end of the twentieth century, no lesser a personage than the Pope should purport to be the saviour of a Marxist revolution. I see it as something midway between a caricature and a miracle.

■ **What do you think the future holds in store for Europe? What role can a united Europe play in a globalized world?**

M. V. M.: I think that whatever idea one may have of Europe, it cannot be separated from the idea of globalization. When the idea of a united Europe was put forward, people were thinking more in terms of power blocs. They thought Europe could be a third way. The first instinct was to prevent the recurrence of conflicting interests that had arisen in the struggle for the European market, which had triggered two world wars. That gave rise to the image of Europe as a bloc which could compete with the American and Asian blocs. Now we're faced with the broader issue of globalization. I think the idea of a united Europe is still attractive because it includes one distinctive feature: the fact that Europe has a cultural substratum that's different from all other possible blocs. This cultural substratum still weighs heavily in all the struggles for emancipation, equality and freedom that have formed part of the history of Europe. A European interpretation of the globalization of capital is bound to differ from that of a culture like that of the United States, where policy is geared to achieving results or to making the system run more efficiently.

On the other hand, in European policy, everything depends on the people conducting it. Even so, there's still a background, a substratum that remembers the struggle for emancipation and social gains. This interpretation differs from that of capitalistic development. That's how I see things.

■ **What if things don't turn out like that?**

M. V. M.: If things weren't like that, I think I'd lose interest in the whole project. But if the Europe taking shape were to have a domestic and foreign policy and a more committed policy towards North-South relations, it would be the kind of Europe I could take an interest in. On the other hand, if it's going to be just another bloc adopting the same policy as other blocs, there would obviously be no other course than to accept it as it is, but in that case I wouldn't be interested in it. I believe the aim and purpose of a united Europe will largely depend on the relationship between the forces existing within it. If the hard-line neo-liberal sectors of unbridled capitalism end up imposing their will, Europe will become an uncontrolled capitalist bloc.

■ **How do you feel about the new electronic communication media? Do you think audio-visual culture will replace the culture of writing?**

M. V. M.: Until now, every innovation that

A **non-stop** novelist

Like his hero, the detective Pepe Carvalho, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (born Barcelona, 1939) looks upon himself as taking a walk through history. Considering his wide-ranging and varied literary output, a journalist was not entirely wrong when he jokingly said, "With Vázquez Montalbán, no sooner have you finished reviewing his last novel than the next one is already in the bookshops." Montalbán readily admits that he is a workaholic and that he has written more than he has lived. "One day I shall have to stop writing in order to remember how to live," he once told an interviewer.

His style, with its peculiar mix of criticism, humour and ingenuity, is an outstanding feature of his writing. Such books as *Crónica sentimental de España* ("A Sentimental Chronicle of Spain"), *Mis almuerzos con gente inquietante* ("My Lunches with Disturbing People"), *El escriba sentado* ("The Seated Scribe"), *Manifiesto subnormal* ("The Subnormal Manifesto") or *Un polaco en la Corte del Rey Juan Carlos* ("A Pole at the Court of King Juan Carlos") reflect his penetrating vision of present-day reality.

A novelist, essayist and poet, Vázquez Montalbán has never stopped working as a journalist. In his weekly column in Spain's newspaper *El País*, as well as in Italy's *La Repubblica* and France's *Le Monde Diplomatique*, he comments on the world scene by analysing the political and social situation or everyday events.

The sequence of novels featuring Carvalho began in 1972 with *Yo Mate a Kennedy* ("I Killed Kennedy"), which brought the author international success. The Galician detective, "a former CIA agent, a former member of the Communist Party, a capricious, self-taught and life-enhancing figure, prone to violence in many of his attitudes and reactions", has over 25 years of fictional life behind him and commands the allegiance of a host of fans who have set up clubs and e-mail discussion groups and even opened bars named after him. The hero of over twenty novels, including *Southern Seas* (which won Spain's prestigious Planeta Prize in 1979 and the Prix International de Littérature Policière in 1981), *La Soledad del Manager (The Angst-Ridden Executive)*, *La Rosa de Alejandría* ("The Rose of Alexandria"), *El Premio* ("The Prize") and *Quinteto de Buenos Aires* ("Buenos Aires Quintet"), Carvalho has made several more or less successful forays into film, television and even comic strips.

Vázquez Montalbán has also written semi-fictional books based on historical figures, including the prize-winning *Autbiografía del General Franco* ("Autobiography of General Franco"), *Pasionaria y los siete enanitos* ("La Pasionaria and the Seven Dwarfs"), and his latest work, *O César o nada* ("Caesar or Nothing"), which is set in the Rome of the Borgias.

His poetic works include *Liquidación de restos de serie* ("Sales of Last Season's Clothes"), *Movimientos sin éxito* ("Unsuccessful Movements"), *Coplas a la muerte de mi tía Daniela* ("Verses on the Death of My Aunt Daniela"), *A la sombra de las muchachas en flor* ("Within a Budding Grove"), *Praga* ("Prague") and *Pero el viajero que huye* ("But the Traveller Who Flees").

A fine gourmet, a magnificent cook and a fan of football, which he regards as a "secular religion", Vázquez Montalbán has always upheld the ideological tenets of the left, which is why he spent time in Franco's prisons when he was a young man.

A writer who describes himself as "Spanish-Catalan and perhaps European or Eurafrican", in 1995 he was awarded the National Prize of Spanish Letters for his body of work. He is a graduate in philosophy and literature, and the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona conferred an honorary doctorate on him in 1997. Modest and unassuming, he is known to his colleagues and friends simply as Manolo. ■

© Raphael Gaillarde/Gamma, Paris

Barcelona is like a character in Montalbán's novels.

has appeared in the media has led to arguments over whether it was going to spell the demise of books. All the gloomiest predictions have been off the mark. Each medium has had its own territory and its own basic function. Perhaps it will be easier for the younger generations, who are already used to computers as working tools. But I don't think it'll ever be possible to read a literary text on a computer screen. It may be possible to create new forms of literary expression via the screen, but they won't have the novel's substance, time-span or length. New forms that are somehow connected with computers may well emerge, but I think that the traditional forms are very closely bound up with the formal shape of books, with the operation that makes it possible to re-read them and go back and forth in them, and with the tactile sensation of the object, the vehicle of literature epitomized by books.

■ **You've received an honorary doctorate from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. What did that mean to you?**

M. V. M.: It wasn't a great symbolic ceremony, since nobody wore gowns or that sort of thing. It was just as my Italian publisher described it when she said it was like a "happening" from May 1968. Everybody was very relaxed and informal. I hardly noticed the ritual side, but obviously I was deeply moved. In a sense, the work I published on the history of communication had borne fruit.

I have very special memories of that university. When I was in prison I wrote a book entitled *Informe sobre la información (Report on Information)*, which I published in 1963. All the material I used came from UNESCO, since that was the only source I was allowed to read in prison. That's why my book is so much like the MacBride Report, although if I may say so myself my work was published first, since I based it on UNESCO's reports on the inequality of newsprint distribution, the unequal distribution of the main news agencies, and so on. In Spain the book was like the one-eyed man in the land of the blind, although I wrote it when I was twenty-two using materials that were far from adequate. At a time when access to all the literature on communication was restricted by the Franco regime or by the social doctrine of the Church, which wasn't much better, the book was a sort of healing balm. It was used in secret by journalism schools and scholars.

I strengthened this link with the university by later becoming a lecturer in communication, conducting a number of seminars and publishing some books. All that forms part of my life's substrata, and my admission to the university implies that this aspect of my work has been recognized.

■ **Do you think young people can look to the twenty-first century with hope?**

M. V. M.: One should never give advice to anybody, or messages of hope for that matter. If we look at things in a fairly cynical light, in the best sense of the word, young people are going to need hope, although that implies self-deception. If you do not have a modicum of hope or confidence in the future, even though you have to deceive yourself, you would reach such a pitch of lucidity that the most advisable course would be to commit individual and collective suicide. To have hope you have to have a certain capacity for self-deception—or such extraordinary faith in your future plans, whether they have to do with religion, love, society or ideology, that you overcome everything in your path. That's not easy in this day and age because it's very hard to believe in great professions of faith after seeing what's happened in history. As a result, we must come to the conclusion that hope is necessary for pursuing the mechanical game of existence. What we do have to abide by, what I convey in everything I write, is the fact that we're standing at a rather ominous point in time as far as culture is concerned. What the dominant culture is now instilling in us above all is that historical knowledge and the search for the past are pointless, and that imagining utopias and thinking that things could be different are likewise pointless.

By trying to analyse why these two cultural trends should have cropped up at the same time, we find that they dovetail perfectly and make you attentive only to the present. You never pass judgment on the spectacle of social or economic disorder, nor do you seek to find out where that disorder originates. Since they've deprived you of the right to find out who in the past is to be blamed for the present, history is also left without anybody to blame. That's what interests them.

Second, when you say we should organize things differently, they tell you you're a dangerous utopian and don't realize where the utopian dreams of the twentieth century have led us, that nothing forces you to accept what they're offering you, whether it be order, the labour market, North-South relations or relations between the centre and the periphery. If you say things can be done differently, it's almost as if you're branded with the stigma of post-revolutionary nostalgia.

So if you're to believe in the future, first you have to think of retrieving the past and of knowing the causes behind the life you're now leading, and to exercise the right to change what you find, which is inherent in any new venture. ■

Interview by **Lucía Iglesias Kuntz**

Your **replies** to our letter

"Tell us what you really think" about our new format, we asked readers in our July-August double issue. The question elicited so many replies that unfortunately we are unable to answer each one personally. And here there is only enough space to focus on the recurring themes among the comments and suggestions you made.

In short, nearly all of you want us to continue in the new direction the *Courier* has taken. "The project seems interesting," one reader, whose name was illegible, wrote cautiously. Everyone else was more categorical.

"Thanks. My most sincere compliments," C. Bachelier commented laconically. "I like the new format. The magazine is very informative," said Kim Burnham. "The new layout will be much useful for us," noted Krishna Mani Bhandary, a librarian. "The new format is a success," wrote François Patrice Ferron. From Argentina, Mario E. Sisti sent "congratulations on the new design as well as the fascinating content." Malaysia's permanent delegate to UNESCO thinks "the new *Courier* is very attractive with its new cover design and varied, quality articles." Jacqueline Dupuis sent us a cheque to take out a subscription in the name of any reader we choose because, she wrote, "I increasingly enjoy the *Courier* and its relevant analysis of the issues it deals with."

One reader, Martine Bonnaud, strongly disagreed. She "regretted" that the *Courier* had turned into "just a good run-of-the-mill magazine. Journalists, she said, were gradually taking over from "top-ranking" scientists, writers and artists.

Her criticism prompts us to make three points. First, we want to give our readers a theoretical overview of today's major issues as well as report on the grassroots realities. In order to do that, we must necessarily ask qualified journalists to write feature stories. Second, we pay close attention to ensuring that articles by top-ranking experts from around the world continue to figure prominently in the *Courier*. That is one of the main reasons we exist. Finally, you will notice that leading specialists also have an indirect voice in the articles written by our journalists, because they go straight to the source for facts and analysis.

Three recurring themes emerged from your suggestions. Guy Langlais, who has been a subscriber "since the 1950s," wrote, "Fifty years have gone by and the same problems are still besetting and eating away at most of the world's societies. There has been some progress, but in most places conditions have deteriorated, often seriously and sometimes irreversibly." He concludes, "we must denounce... the illusions, the evils, the distortions, the empty innovations, the throw-away society... and support resistance, which is vital. It's up to you to wake us up. Otherwise you will serve no purpose."

In what areas? Mainly, sustainable development in a broad sense—equitable and co-operative development, primarily between the North and the South, rich and poor—and the environment. But the *Courier* is not in the business of painting the gloomiest possible picture. The magazine also highlights, in the words of Francis Dubois, "the successful experiments... that encourage us to keep on trying".

Many readers also asked us to bring back the letters page. So that's just what we did.

The editors

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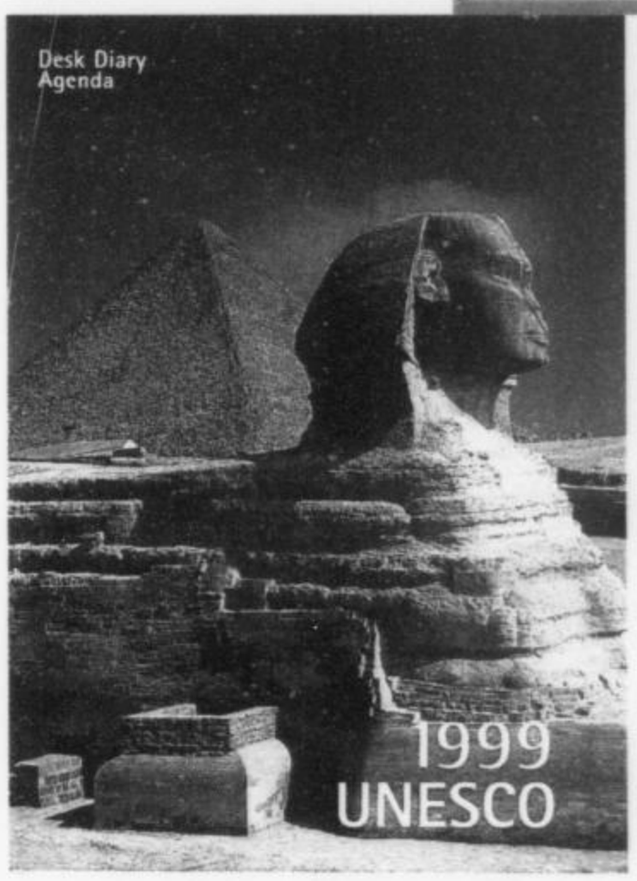
UNESCO World Heritage Desk Diary

1999

Most of the 'seven wonders of the world' of ancient times have disappeared. But today, more than 500 sites are on the World Heritage List and constitute a heritage to be treasured as testimonies of the world's cultural and natural diversity. Their preservation is our common responsibility. By buying this diary you will help towards safeguarding the World Heritage.



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